VIKTOR E. FRANKL

Author of *Man's Search for Meaning*

EMBRACING HOPE

On Freedom, Responsibility & the Meaning of Life

FOREWORD BY ALEXANDER VESELY,
COFOUNDER OF THE VIKTOR FRANKL INSTITUTE OF AMERICA AND
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ALSO BY VIKTOR E. FRANKL

Man's Search for Meaning

Yes to Life in Spite of Everything

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Introduction by Dr. Tobias Esch

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FOREWORD

My grandfather Viktor Frankl was a cheerful and loving man, dedicated to his role as a medical doctor. He possessed a genuine curiosity about people and their stories, finding joy in the little things life had to offer. However, he could display moments of grumpiness and impatience, particularly if bothered by trivial matters, especially before his first cup of coffee or if anyone disturbed the meticulously arranged papers on his desktop. Nevertheless, on the rare occasion his temper flared, he was quick to apologize.

In addition to his endearing qualities, he had a knack for injecting humor into situations by sharing silly jokes. He had a penchant for spoiling his grandchildren with trips to the fairground, firmly believing that the responsibility of imparting discipline did not fall within the purview of a grandparent. Moreover, seeking his advice was a privilege I enjoyed daily, without the need for an appointment. Observing him, one might have assumed he had encountered few bad days in his life. To me, he embodied the archetype of what one envisions in a grandfather.

When I was nineteen years old, my sister and I received an invitation to deliver the opening message at a conference on logotherapy, his meaning-centered approach to mental health, which he had developed during his early days as a doctor. At eighty-eight years old and grappling with a deteriorating heart condition, he was advised against flying. In light of this, my sister and I took on the responsibility, intending to read a greeting message and engage with the audience.

On the flight to Toronto, eagerly anticipating the upcoming event, I delved into *Man's Search for Meaning* for the first time, in which he recounted his experiences in the Holocaust. On that day, the realization hit me: my grandfather had traversed hell and returned. This revelation sparked a cascade of questions in my mind, starting with this: How could someone who had been dehumanized, beaten, nearly starved to death, and

permanently separated from loved ones remain the humorous, life-affirming person I knew?

Contemplating his journey, I wondered about the thoughts that occupied his mind when he had to relinquish everything that had sustained him: the hope of reuniting with his wife, mother, and brother. How did he resist becoming a shattered, embittered man? Returning to a war-ravaged Vienna, he described the situation as more challenging than his time in the actual camps. There, he wrote in *Man's Search,* the primary goal was clear: survive for the chance to be reunited with loved ones. Now, he faced the void of losing his "why"—that driving force of life. In those days, many who endured similar fates succumbed to overwhelming loss by ending their own lives, a choice he too contemplated. Instead, he clung to the only meaningful tasks he could conceive: resuming his work as a doctor and as a writer, as well as aiding those in need by remaining true to his motto: "It's not about what we expect from life, but what life expects from us."

As a nineteen-year-old, I felt my own problems of failed exams and relationship breakups paled in significance compared to my grandfather's unimaginable tribulations and profound experiences. After all, what were my minor setbacks in comparison with his? How fortunate I was not to have to grapple with far more substantial challenges.

In the early 1950s, he received his first invitation to lecture before a group of US psychiatrists. After the presentation, the host approached him with a curious observation: "Dr. Frankl, did you notice that the people seemed a little distant, even cold?" To this, my grandfather replied in the affirmative. The host then probed, "Aren't you wondering why that is the case?" Frankl offered his assumption, "Well, I assume the majority of the audience are psychoanalysts, and my methods differ significantly from their ideas." However, the host countered, "That is true, but it's not the reason." Puzzled, my grandfather inquired, "So what is it?" The host explained, "You see, doctor, you went through terrible suffering, surviving Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Türkheim, almost dying and losing almost everyone you loved. You suffered gravely and you have overcome it. They didn't. The reason is envy."

This revelation startled my grandfather, prompting him to reflect. He then articulated something he would often express thereafter, a sentiment only someone with that kind of history could utter: "Everyone has their own Auschwitz." By this, he conveyed the idea that suffering is not comparable

between individuals. Regardless of how small one's worst moment may seem in comparison to another's, it remains the most challenging experience in that person's life. Life inherently includes suffering, manifested in various ways. Sooner or later, each of us undergoes periods of suffering beyond our control, whether linked to the loss of cherished things, illness, or the death of a beloved person. Sometimes, suffering arises from guilt, a consequence of a wrong decision and the ensuing accountability. Regardless of the unique causes and experiences of suffering, the overall impact is similar.

My grandfather imparted to me the insight that there are various ways to confront the pain of inevitable suffering. Finding meaning in adversity, such as viewing a negative experience as a lesson in life, transforms the endured pain into something purposeful. His own painful encounters with suffering enabled him to become more adept at offering assistance or solace to those in despair—those who, like him, struggled to perceive meaning in their lives.

Many inquire about how I learned from my grandfather, how he taught me. Remarkably, he did not rely on verbal instruction; instead, he embodied his teachings. Through simple observation, I, like anyone close to him, learned. He placed unwavering trust in my capacity to make choices, just as he trusted his own. I often pondered how, after all he endured, he maintained such profound faith in others. Who could have faulted him for harboring a lack of trust in fellow human beings? The answer lies in his perspective on human nature. According to him, no one is entirely good or evil; as human beings, we embody both capacities and possess the freedom to choose between them.

Following the voice of conscience, he believed, might not be the easiest path, often leading in a direction distinct from the majority. During World War II, while many who were not declared enemies opted to blindly conform, there were also those exceptional few who, upon recognizing the grave injustices and atrocities surrounding them, stood up for what their conscience dictated. In most cases, they paid the highest price. One may contemplate whether humankind has evolved since then. What injustices and cruelties persist in today's world, accepted or ignored by the majority? Who are the individuals listening to their conscience, resisting the urge to merely "fit in"? These questions remain poignant and relevant reflections on the nature of humanity.

In 1988, a significant event marked the fiftieth anniversary of Austria's annexation into Nazi Germany, and my grandfather was invited to speak. Addressing the gathering, he reflected on the "race-madness" of the Nazis, who categorized human beings based on ethnicity. With pointed emphasis, he stated that, in his lifetime, he had encountered only two distinct "races" of humans—a term he enclosed in quotation marks. According to his perspective, within every nation, political party, or group, one could find two "races" of people: the decent and the indecent. He maintained that decent individuals, constituting a perpetual minority, would likely remain so. Consequently, the potential for another Holocaust existed universally and at any given time.

Responding to a reporter's question about his seemingly pessimistic view of human nature, Frankl clarified that his statement was neither pessimistic nor optimistic but rather "activistic." Emphasizing the importance of each person striving to be among the minority of "decent" individuals, he asserted that decency or indecency is purely a matter of personal choice. Rejecting divisive categorizations based on ethnicity, age, gender, or religion, he underscored the unity of one humankind. Peace, he contended, could prevail when individuals recognized this and came together in a shared commitment to a common meaning.

Reflecting on the twenty-three years I spent in close proximity to one of the great minds of the twentieth century, I am grateful for the opportunity to have witnessed and learned from him—to see how life consistently presents opportunities to discover and fulfill meaning. Whether through our contributions to the world, the creations we manifest, the experiences we undergo, such as love, or the attitudes we adopt during challenging times, life poses new questions and confronts us with opportunities and challenges, both significant and trivial. Our responses to these moments shape our journey—whether we perceive ourselves merely as victims of life's circumstances or as co-creators, whether we take blessings for granted or express gratitude for what we possess.

Frankl's decision to persevere after 1945, driven largely by the desire to share his insights into the human condition, has allowed readers like you, and readers all over the world, to benefit from them. I am glad my grandfather had much time after the war to put his thoughts on paper, enabling the rediscovery and translation of new texts, including those you are about to read. In my view, his insights have endured the test of time and

remain as relevant today as ever. Confronted with that notion, he would likely just have smiled and quipped: “I guess my work can never be out of fashion because it was never in fashion.”

—ALEXANDER VESELY-FRANKL

Vienna, January 2024

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INTRODUCTION

People have been fascinated by Viktor E. Frankl for decades, me included. In the United States, where I worked as a scientist for several years, his works were “must-reads.” The Library of Congress (the de facto national library of the USA) lists his book *Man’s Search for Meaning* as one of the ten most influential books in history. Scientists and academics, commentators and artists, politicians and celebrities, as well as ordinary people, regularly mention his works as being some of the most important books that we should all read in our lives. I believe the same may be true of this book in the future.

Viktor E. Frankl was one of the outstanding figures of the twentieth century. Born in Vienna in 1905, he first obtained a doctorate in medicine and later neurology (becoming a professor at Vienna University, with guest professorships at Harvard, among others) and made a lasting and multifaceted impression on almost the entire twentieth century, far beyond the realm of medicine. In doing so, in his personal actions and creativity, he conquered the darker sides, as well as the less dark aspects of his century, as well as expounding on what was to become his life’s work: The search for meaning, for what makes us truly human. The question of how freedom of spirit and of action can prevail even under extreme conditions. How free will and genuine dignity, including the responsibility that is bound up with them—even how a confrontation with suffering and with one’s own mortality—can be transcended to attain inner growth and meaning.

Frankl describes us human beings as successful “conquerors of transience.” And as early as 1946, assigns to us a “planetary responsibility.” He was way ahead of his time, and today would most certainly be a popular talk-show guest, social media star or influencer.

Viktor E. Frankl grew up as part of the Jewish community in Austria and later lost almost his entire family in the Holocaust. When, as a result of the liberation, he finally returned to Vienna—after he had endured four different Nazi concentration camps (including Theresienstadt and

Auschwitz)—there was no longer anyone left to welcome him. All the people he loved had been gassed or tortured to death, including his wife, his parents and his brother.

Why go on living? As Frankl himself described, he decided at that point that he would not kill himself *for the time being*. At the very least, he wanted to "reconstruct" his first book, *Ärztliche Seelsorge* (*The Doctor and the Soul*), which he had written before the Second World War, and which was then published in 1946. In other words, he wanted to re-evaluate the experiences he had lived through. This is how his highly influential work . . . *trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen* (*Man's Search for Meaning*) subsequently came into being. This is different from the way the story is usually told—namely, that he did not ask himself the big question about humankind's search for meaning until during his periods of incarceration in the concentration camps, and therefore that the most important work of his life was "wrenched" out of him by the horror he experienced. In fact, Frankl later confirmed that he had conceived all his ideas beforehand and had already written down much of the material. In this way, in his own words, he had made himself into a "proof of concept"—he was living proof: he saw his own suffering, and his growth as a result of this suffering, as confirmation of the hypotheses that he had developed before the Holocaust.

FRANKL'S WORK—TIMELESS, CONSTANTLY INSPIRING

The texts in this book are unique and fascinating. They span a period of forty years and provide a good overview of Frankl's oeuvre. They also give a direct insight into his original thinking, his character and the way he was able to transform his own experiences into meaning. It is striking how early and how completely his hypotheses were formulated in all their clarity, which has allowed them to stay more or less stable over the decades, right up to today. His ideas have been developed but have not been fundamentally called into question.

At the same time, when reading this book, we discover, perhaps with some astonishment, just how far ahead of his time Frankl was; or, if we change our perspective, how we human beings hardly seem to have evolved or changed since then. In other words: today, Frankl's work seems more relevant and more important than ever.

This book contains four texts, including a 1955 article from the medical journal *Wiener Medizinische Wochenschrift* ("Collective Neuroses"); a 1977

transcribed interview with Frankl from the Canadian TV program *Man Alive* (“*Man Alive*—Viktor Frankl”); a lecture from the Franco-Austrian university meeting of 1946 (“Existential Analysis and the Problems of Our Times”); and a lecture that Frankl gave at Dornbirn, Austria, in 1984 (“Conquering Transience”). Although much has been written, reported and spoken about Frankl, the above texts contain surprising new material, as well as exciting references to cutting-edge research questions and transdisciplinary trends in science.

Hence, it appears that Frankl is still at the forefront of his field, and his views are to this day often breathtaking.

VIEWING FRANKL’S WORK FROM TODAY’S PERSPECTIVE

I would like to highlight three aspects that particularly engaged and inspired me while reading these four pieces. They illustrate the topical nature of Frankl’s work, as well as its relationship to contemporary science.

First, how do we deal with our own mortality? In the knowledge that death means the end—in other words, under the threat of nothingness, in the inevitable and final emptiness that awaits and surrounds us—how can we still find meaning?

In this context, Frankl evokes Aristotle’s concept of eudaemonia: the fact that human beings achieve their life’s work through their own innate way of leading their lives or indeed by simply existing—this in itself creates meaning. In other words, as we get older, we may experience an increasing sense of “reward,” in the form of feelings of gratitude and fulfilment. Based on my own research as a neuroscientist, I would like to add that, as we go through life, our brain’s own internal reward system increasingly rewards us with feelings of contentment and joy.

To illustrate his point, Frankl also used the image of a hayloft or barn into which, as the annual farming cycle draws to a close—at the time of the harvest festival and thanksgiving but ultimately over the course of our whole life—we store the fruits of our labor. Outside, we perhaps see only the harvested fields and the forlorn stubble from the cut crops, but on the inside, abundance reigns. Here Frankl brings in the idea of the successful “conquest of transience.” Thus, people become the producers of their own past. Life comes toward us from the front and passes through us—in a sense, we are constantly plowing along its path—so that true meaning lies not before us, but around us and behind us. What we have created—our

legacy—is our enduring manifestation, the true realization of ourselves, which no one can ever take away from us. In this sense, we are winners through the very act of living, which is how we continuously create meaning and significance.

This view also reminds me of the contemporary philosopher Wilhelm Schmid, who counteracted a fear of death (more precisely, a fear of meaninglessness and emptiness) by concluding that individually we can derive meaning and significance from the very fact that we are alive—that we embody a unique possibility chosen from the endless possibilities of life.

At this point, in our own model, the neurobiology of happiness, we have described what we call "Type C happiness"—a deep sense of joy and contentment, a feeling of arriving or having arrived, of no longer wanting things or having to do things. This occurs when people look at their lives with gratitude and a sense of connectedness—connected with themselves as well as with future generations. When you can detect a legacy or an "inner knowledge" and you feel responsible for preserving it, when your focus is no longer on becoming but on having and handing on, that is when inner peace reigns and emptiness or nothingness no longer seem to bother us (well, hardly).

Second, what, precisely, gives us meaning and purpose? Here, Frankl gives us three answers that have been impressively confirmed by current research on happiness, as well as in our own laboratory. A person finds meaning when they have work or a task to carry out; when they love or are loved; or when, through suffering, they are tested by life and experience growth as a result of the crisis. With this explanation, Frankl rejects the idea that true meaning and deep happiness can only be experienced through suffering. Under no circumstances should one seek out suffering in order to find meaning. But the very fact that a person can turn "a tragedy into a triumph" makes us profoundly human.

Here, Frankl employs his idea of "self-transcendence": by taking responsibility not only for ourselves but also for our impact on the planet, and by becoming stronger through our difficulties and growing as human beings, we are able to feel the "we" more powerfully than the "I" or ego—and can experience a deep sense of connectedness, as well as feeling truly responsible, across not only physical but also generational boundaries. However, the premise is that the self would be transcended and would not

stand in the way as an inflated “ego.” In our own research with people who have experienced severe life-changing events, we find striking parallels with Frankl’s more observational assumptions. For example, subjects who now use a wheelchair and who are suddenly no longer able to follow the path in life they had originally planned sometimes experience “post-traumatic growth,” i.e., they become more mature and may even feel happiness, freedom, gratitude and a deep contentment.

Third, people are suffering from a “sickness of our times.” As early as seventy years ago, Frankl had diagnosed a “sickness of our times” or “manager’s disease.” This is similar to what we would now call “burnout” (in the past, we would have also described it as a “nervous breakdown”). He points to the zeitgeist as an essential source of this sickness (including what we would today call stress or simply overwork), as well as an inner feeling of not fitting in—a lack of internal coherence, resonance and meaning. Therefore, there are both external and internal factors interacting negatively here.

Our own research tallies with this idea. In it, we add the dimension of significance as a central entity into the relevant definition of health—to add a subjective, semiotic category. In our case, we divide these dimensions into two subcategories, one based on external factors (culture and homeland), the other on internal factors (meaning and spirituality). However, the central feature is a feeling of connectedness that is related either to a higher, transcendent state of being, or of living anchored within everyday life. In other words, we find our home within ourselves and/or in our physical environment (and also, within that, a feeling of connectedness with something “higher”—the “ultimate truth,” as Frankl puts it). If that is not the case, if this important health resource is not present, then burnout or even “boreout” (a state of pathological boredom)—certainly a neurosis, according to Frankl—develops. This happens especially when a crisis occurs, when fateful life events hit us hard.

BE INSPIRED!

Viktor Frankl teaches us always to remain broad and open, not narrow and pinched. And we should remain open even in hopeless situations, even when we have been subjected to appalling injustice, or when we fail as a collective, such as in the Third Reich, or in the face of the current environmental crisis. He rigorously rejects collective *guilt,* instead stressing

individual and collective *responsibility.* And he underlines the possibility of altruism and transcending the self. He certainly does not preach passivity, quite the opposite.

According to Frankl, people are free. Every person can, and indeed must, constantly make decisions. And the *decision to find meaning* is one of those decisions. It can be made at any time, without worrying about the pros and cons. Someone who thinks and behaves like this will always retain their dignity and self-respect. And they demonstrate steadfastness and free will. This free will, as the psychologist and thinker William James wrote, is an intention, not so much an action. According to Frankl, it is a *will to meaning.*

This is not so much about an active search as it is about *having* meaning, about taking responsibility, even for meaning itself.

The contemporary science agrees with this: it's not the person who searches for meaning but the person who has experienced meaning and "has" it, who is happiest (and, incidentally, is also healthier).

Similarly, Frankl clarifies what he calls "psychologism": he doesn't think much of pathologizing the psyche; psychoanalysis and depth psychology do not come off well. He wants to inspire us, in the truest sense of the word. Indeed, it may be helpful to talk about the soul and even to have faith or be religious (Frankl himself believed in the "absolute"), but these are not in any way prerequisites for finding purpose and experiencing meaning in life. In addition, a therapy that is too intrusive may actually misjudge the person's spiritual capabilities—the wonderful "defiant power of the human spirit."

The century in which these texts were written, Frankl's century, encompassed the whole kaleidoscope of our human existence. And it seems that its significance endures. Then, as now, freedom and powerlessness, the collective and the individual, the external and the internal, stood in direct and sometimes irreconcilable opposition to one another. The crises of our time are immense. Even so, it seems important that we keep our dignity. And that we remain defiant and stubborn, that we say *yes in spite of everything*—and take responsibility.

In this sense, may the great Viktor E. Frankl be an inspirational role model for us all!

—DR. TOBIAS ESCH

Spring 2023

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NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

“Every work of art is a child of its age.”

—WASSILY KANDINSKY

The lectures, interviews and texts by Viktor E. Frankl printed in this book come from the four decades between 1946 and 1984. This book is a child of the time and may contain language or depictions in common usage at the time that some readers may find offensive today. The publisher has also made some adjustments to punctuation, spelling, and in correcting obvious errors.

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Meaning and Responsibility in the Face of Transience

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In “Conquering Transience,” Viktor E. Frankl revisits the theme of transience. He talks about the significance of meaning and responsibility in the face of our mortality. This is one of Frankl’s later texts, given as a lecture at Dornbirn, Austria, October 23, 1984.*

CONQUERING TRANSIENCE

Dr. Köb, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your warm welcome. I would just like to begin by confirming that the topic of my lecture is not “conquering the past” but “conquering transience.” So I won’t be talking about conquering the past, or even conquering one’s own personal past, rather: how a person can manage the transience of human existence, the transience of life—i.e., how he can cope with this fact, and deal with the knowledge that human life is essentially impermanent. Or more specifically, how an individual can get to a place where he can say “yes” to life in spite of its transience, how he can affirm his life in spite of his own mortality.

So, in the face of death, life needs to be managed. But we must never forget that life is a constant process of dying, the continuous withering away of something or someone that we love. You could say that the life of a human being is a constant farewell. And that’s not just in the sense of the two big goals in life that Freud defined in psychoanalysis, his own theory and therapy, which are the ability to work and the capacity for pleasure; but we must also get to grips with the human being’s capacity for *suffering.* Death is only the endpoint of the constant leave-taking, this continuous process of something akin to withering away. And the fundamental question is whether this transience, this mortality, works retroactively (thus long before we reach the endpoint) and makes life not worth living, devalues it or makes it meaningless, robbing it of all meaning. That is the first question that we must ask ourselves. And I would like to start with the assumption that death is not only unable to take away life’s meaning, it actually *gives* life meaning.

Just imagine what would happen, what life would look like, if there were no death. Imagine what it would be like if you could postpone anything and everything, if you could put it off for eternity. You wouldn't have to do anything today or tomorrow. Everything could just as easily be done next week, next month, next year, in a decade, in 100 or 1,000 years. Only in the face of death, only under pressure from the finiteness, the temporal limitation of human existence, is there any point in going about our business, and not only in going about our business, but in experiencing life, and not only in experiencing life but also in loving someone, and even in bravely enduring and surviving something that is inflicted on us.

Perhaps you will now understand how logotherapy, this branch of psychotherapy, has put forward a categorical imperative, a maxim, a code of conduct from a philosophical standpoint, more or less in the tradition of Immanuel Kant. And this imperative, this warning, goes like this: "Live as if you were living for the second time and as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now!"

Do you understand what that means? Think about what kind of appeal to our sense of responsibility fundamentally underpins our human existence, what kind of powerful appeal this signifies, allowing us to carefully extract the best possible meaning out of a given situation, trying to actualize the possibility of finding the meaning in a given situation out of this spirit of responsibility—and this also means that we may have to do an about-turn at the last minute, in the knowledge that there's a danger that we might do something so badly that we will regret it and we will never be able to make up for it.

You see, this applies right down to the most banal situations. I'm sorry if I'm getting personal, but I would like to show you what this looks like in practice, in everyday life. Many years ago, a friend sent his son to see me. "Now why don't you talk to"—he called me Uncle Viktor—"why don't you talk to Uncle Viktor?" My friend's son was in danger of getting involved in the drugs scene, in danger of straying into a criminal gang. It really was a precarious situation. *What am I going to do with this lad? I'm not some kind of instructor or God knows what. What am I going to say to him*? And so, I improvised and simply said the following: "You know why you have come here. What do you want me to tell you? The only thing I can say to you is: Think about this: In five, ten, or twenty years, there are two possibilities for you. Either you will say to yourself, 'Do you remember when you went to

see Uncle Viktor and you thought a bit about your life? It's a good thing that, at the very last moment, you pulled yourself back from this or that.' Or, in ten or twenty years, you will say, 'What an idiot I was back then, when I went to see Uncle Viktor. He showed me the various possibilities, the crossroads, the fork in the road—and I, like a fool, just kept going on my merry way.' These two possibilities stand before you. I just want you to think about it, that's all."

It's difficult to say what is cause and what is effect. Whether or not it worked as a catalyst for him, like a chemical process that simply activates a reaction, or whether it went in one ear and out the other, it's hard to tell.

There's a theological term that has always fascinated me, the notion of the *mysterium iniquitatis*, meaning the secret of sin, of guilt. You can never resolve a criminal act right down to the final ramifications of the complex web of causation. For that would rob the person concerned of the last remnants of human dignity. Do you follow me? By doing this, you make him into a machine, an instrument, a mechanism that, under the influence of these sociological and psychological or biological factors and facts, could not act or behave in any other way. That way, you negate the freedom of a human being to decide for himself. You take the responsibility off his shoulders to behave as meaningfully as possible, and to behave in a way that's true to himself, in the best sense of the word. You rob him of that. You believe that you are doing him a humanitarian service. But you are dehumanizing and depersonalizing this person, this criminal.

But it could be done so differently. I don't want to go into that now, but I will say: a last fragment of inexplicably free choice is there, lies there, is available, even with the most serious crime. And if you don't see that, or don't want to see it, because of a particular ideology that prescribes determinism, then you will never reach the core of the personality of a criminal, and no jargon, such as "socialization processes," will help you.

The point is that you learn to see the humanity in the human being and that you don't forget to see it. Until the last moment, right down to his last breath, and even in an insane person, and even in a person who is a hardened criminal, humanity remains.

I spoke earlier about our opportunities to fulfil a meaning. They must be noticed, they must be actualized, achieved. And that is the task of every human being in every single situation in life. For when a possibility for meaning has been fulfilled, and once we have transformed such a

potentiality into a reality—and I mean *once*—then we have done it once and for all. It remains, and no one can undo it, no one can cancel it out. We have rescued it into the past. There it is stored; there it is safeguarded precisely from transience.

For only the possibilities need to be fulfilled, only they are transitory. But when we have actualized one of these possibilities, we have made it everlasting. We have not just actualized it; we have made it eternal. In the past, nothing is irretrievably lost (as people often believe), but rather the opposite: it is captured and saved, it is preserved there and is protected from —and this is our topic—the grasp of transience. Being past is still a form of being, and I would argue that it is the *safest* form of being. I would like to explain this with a parable: usually, people see only the harvested stubble fields of transience. And they overlook the full barns of what is past, into which they have long since collected and rescued the harvest of their lives. The experiences, the deeds, the work that they have completed, nothing and nobody can ever take that away or rob them of it, or undo it or reverse it—or, as it says in the vocal text of one of Gustav Mahler's symphonies, "Nothing that you have fought for, that you have loved or that you have suffered is in vain."* This means that life possesses and retains its meaning in spite of its transience.

However, now you must scrutinize the question of whether it really is like this. You must ask yourselves, "Great, so life can be meaningful in spite of its transience. But why should it have any meaning whatsoever? Do we even need to have meaning in life?" In a word, you are asking about the meaning of having a meaning. A meta-meaning, that is what we are discussing here. Well, I can easily give you the answer: a, let's say, phenomenological recollection of an original and fundamentally anthropological state of affairs (I will clarify that for you in a moment) shows us the following: fundamentally, man is a being who steadfastly strives for meaning, who searches for meaning.

To put it more elegantly, a human being is a meaning-oriented being, and if he succeeds in finding meaning on his search, then he will be happy. But please note, *only* then. For if he pursues happiness, to the same degree that he does so, he simply cannot become happy, because he would have *no reason* to be happy. But, paradoxically and ironically, the person who has found meaning becomes not only happy but conversely also eminently capable of bearing suffering—in our psychological jargon, he develops

“frustration tolerance.” He can bear hardships for the sake of a meaning. He can make sacrifices for the sake of a person, or for God’s sake. He can do without, for the sake of a cause. Thus, he will not only be happy if he can perceive a meaning, but conversely, he will also be able to cope with suffering to the same degree.

At an advanced age, Cushing, the greatest surgeon of all times,* said to his former assistant, “The only way to endure life is always to have a task to complete.”

Thus, when someone finds what they are looking for in their search for meaning in life, perhaps even in their death, then they become happy and also capable of bearing suffering. In fact, they don’t just become capable of suffering, but the other way around: if they cannot see any meaning, if they do not have a vision of a personal, freely chosen life task that appeals to them, then they are not only incapable of suffering, they are also incapable of living. That didn’t come from a psychiatrist, it came from a physicist, because it is actually a quote from Albert Einstein: “The man who regards his own life . . . as meaningless is not merely unhappy but hardly fit for life.”

And this fact, this truth, is something we neurologists have to deal with on a daily and hourly basis in our consultations with patients!

Just think about current social problems—for example, unemployment. Bear in mind that more than half a century ago, I described a so-called “unemployment neurosis,” and also gave it that name, in the journal *Sozialärztliche Rundschau*, and was able to prove something interesting. And believe me, all over the world, there are books being published about the phenomenon of unemployment from the psychological point of view—this is still the case, just as it was 50 years ago. We found out at the time that an unemployed man who lapses into a depression so serious that he becomes suicidal is not suffering so much because of the unemployment itself, but essentially, the depression is caused only by one thing: a dual realization. For he equates these two things: being *unemployed* means being *useless* and being *useless* means that life is *meaningless.* And so he becomes depressed. And at that point (but only when he falls victim to this dual realization—and only then) he is in danger of committing suicide. At that time, by hook or by crook, I managed to get these young people into youth organizations, public libraries and adult education colleges as “attendants,” as we called them back then. Voluntarily, without getting a

penny for their work, they took on these duties that they felt were meaningful. Their stomachs rumbled, just as before, but their depression had vanished. If I had not seen it with my own eyes, I would not have believed it.

Now, imagine this: we live in a so-called leisure society. People just don't know what to do with their free time. During this free time, an inner emptiness, a worldwide and pervasive feeling of futility, breaks out in the form of Sunday neurosis, or "weekend depression." But the problem of unemployment is apparently going to be cured by a reduction in working hours! And we already have so many problems with the retirement crisis, which also represents an existential crisis, a crisis of meaning, when, from one day to the next, pensioners don't know what to do with this sudden surge of free time. The problems of early retirement and so on cannot be solved sociopolitically by catching pensioners in the social welfare net. The net is too wide-meshed and the psychological problems that accompany all this will just fall through it. This means that we must also take account of this issue—however we try to solve the sociopolitical problems.

With the retirement crisis, we now find ourselves at the forefront of gerontological psychiatry, the psychiatric problems and the prophylaxis concerning elderly people.

As mentioned, the problems have essentially remained the same over the last half-century, but the terminology has changed. For example, today we no longer talk about "lunatic asylums" but "old people's homes" and the like. But at the time that insane asylums existed under that name, I once asked an elderly lady in such an institution, "How are you, what do you do all day?" And she replied, "My God, Doctor, at night I sleep and in the day I'm insane." That had become the entire content of her life.

We can see that these are all essential problems for gerontological psychiatry, particularly because our life expectancy depends on whether we are still encountering values, opportunities to find meaning, and tasks, even in retirement.

And the other way around: I will never forget that I once read that Goethe finished the second part of his tragedy, *Faust*, in January 1832, after seven years' work. And just two months after he had signed and sealed the manuscript, he was dead. We can say with confidence that, for at least some of those seven years, he had lived "beyond his biological capabilities." But

the vision of this task, his life's work that he needed to complete, did not let go of him and sustained him.

This applies not only to being active but also to remaining receptive. I don't think I have ever met an old man who impressed me as much as Professor [Josef] Berze, who, for many years, was the director of the big psychiatric institution in Vienna, the Steinhof, as it was known. The last time I saw him, Professor Berze was well over 90, and I will never forget the huge tower of reference books piled up on his desk. I have never seen anything like this with much younger colleagues. He continued to work on and study his subject without interruption. And here, near the Swiss border, for the sake of piquancy, I would like to tell you this: he and I were—and I am convinced of this—the only people in Vienna, if not in Austria, who had read the wonderful book by Ludwig Binswanger, *Grundformen und Erkenntnis Menschlichen Daseins* [*Principles and Knowledge of Human Existence*], from A to Z, and word for word. The book is over 800 pages long—in Zurich, they only ever called it the "phone book." Professor Berze was 90 at the time and I was around 40; so he was half a century ahead of me, setting an example.

Please don't hold it against me if I sometimes throw in a few personal anecdotes, but I can't go on endlessly about the "phenomenological analysis of pre-reflexive, ontological self-perception." I would love to, but I would rather write about it and talk about other things.

Please don't misunderstand me: I am not as oversimplistic as I sound or as I seem. I don't deny that even someone like Professor Berze had a few defects in terms of his cerebral performance. That's actually not the point. He could compensate for those defects and, with the rest of his capabilities, was able to achieve far more than the average young psychiatrist or neurologist in Vienna at that time.

And I will never forget what happened to me several years ago. I was climbing a rock face in the Rax Mountains, and "Gruber Naz" was my guide at that time. Ignaz Gruber is a very well-known mountain guide who had already led tours in the Himalayas and other high mountain ranges. And, as he sat there at the belay station and pulled in the rope, he looked at me pityingly and said: "Don't take this the wrong way, Professor, but if I'm honest, you have no strength left at all. But, you know, you make up for it with your clever climbing technique—I must say, people could really learn to climb from watching you." I nearly exploded with pride—a man who'd

led expeditions in the Himalayas was saying this to me! But he meant it sincerely: there are compensatory mechanisms, coping mechanisms, that don't just compensate for the defects of brute force, they can actually overcompensate for them. And a couple of years later, when I climbed the Luis-Trenker-Kamin* and the Second Sella Tower with a Ladin guide, I asked him afterwards, "Please be honest with me; should I stop?" "No, don't stop. Never stop."

On that note, I would like to move on to the problem of stopping. Should one stop? Many people suffer from never having begun, never having lived their own life. For a few years, this was fashionably known as the "midlife crisis." It looks like this: many years ago, a prominent American diplomat came to my office and said he would like to continue his psychoanalysis with me. He had lain on the couch of a Manhattan psychoanalyst for five years, and the analyst had told him that his psychoanalysis was far from being complete and he would have to continue when he moved to Vienna. So, he came to me, and I asked him why he actually wanted to be psychoanalyzed. He told me that he disagreed with American foreign policy and the psychoanalyst had spent five years trying to talk him out of it: "Look, this isn't about foreign policy. What you hate is not the government, not the president, not the secretary of state—it's your father. You are in conflict with your father-imago, believe me. You must make up with your father, and then you will suddenly find American foreign policy to your liking." I'm exaggerating, of course, I'm caricaturing the situation, but that's more or less how it went for five whole years. They couldn't see reality anymore, let alone the political facts. They only saw more and more images and symbols, but they could no longer perceive the wood of reality for the trees of the symbols. They spun themselves into their own cocoon, a personal monadology, no longer transcending themselves into reality, even political reality. Instead, they had spent five years talking about images and the symbolic value of this or that. They analyzed dreams, childhood memories, and so on.

I asked the man, "Alright, so you haven't enjoyed politics for a long time. What would you like to do instead?" He said he wanted to move into a particular industry. He found it interesting, and he felt that he also had a talent for it, that he would be able to hold his own in that field. After the second discussion—I'm deliberately not saying "therapy session," let alone "couch therapy session"—I gave him the green light and he did actually

change his career. And six months later, I received a letter from him from a distant country. He was the happiest person alive . . .

His will to meaning had been frustrated; that was the whole story. And his analyst had searched again and again: there must be something behind this that must be related to childhood conflicts between the ego, the id and the superego. The man's need for meaning was not satisfied, and he felt it acutely: here is the boundary, here is the watershed. He had to decide right then, this way or that way, if he wanted to feel fulfilled. His midlife crisis was in reality a crisis of meaning (and most of them are!).

A companion piece: there was an American steel magnate who had been involved in developing the atomic bomb, among other things. He did not find his work particularly satisfying, so he became an evangelical pastor. But he wasn't completely satisfied with that either, so he came to Vienna and studied with me for two years. Then he returned to the USA and became a logotherapist, and specialized in a very particular area: he advised industrialists, managers, executives—who, for whatever reason, had left their companies and needed to find work elsewhere—and helped them to find meaning in their professional field.

Some time ago, Rolf von Eckartsberg* from Harvard University wrote a thesis about 100 former Harvard students who had graduated and then, 20 years later, had become famous and well-established lawyers, surgeons, even psychiatrists and psychoanalysts. For most of them, their private lives, their married lives, were also absolutely fine. In any case, they had made careers for themselves, but a significant percentage of them simply suffered from the fact that their lives seemed pointless, and they couldn't get over it.

This is important for the following reason: these people often despair, and I have a theory—which, of course, I can't prove here and now—that every instance of despair is actually caused by a kind of idolatry, that is to say, the idolization of a particular value.

For example, when does a woman tend to despair? Some women despair when they can't find a husband, when they can't have children, whether they are married or unmarried. (The latter is very much in fashion, and apparently it's already going out of fashion again.) At any rate, a woman who idolizes and makes absolute the value of being married and having children stipulates that the life of a woman can only be meaningful if she has a child or if she is married.

If one makes these values (and that's what they are) absolute, then one is programmed for despair. Therefore, it is important for us to reverse this process of idolization, to be open to possibilities for finding meaning that can be different from hour to hour, from minute to minute, and that are certainly different from person to person. *Hic et nunc*, here and now, life is offering me meaning—in one way or another. I can be active and shape it, or I can be passive and receptive, and let beauty and truth influence me through research or education, or by experiencing and accepting the essence of human beings not only in their humanity but also in their uniqueness and singularity—in other words, when I love them.

Those are possibilities for finding meaning, but not exclusive ones. They could change at any moment. At any moment, the offer—the offer of meaning in my life—can be different. I must be open, I must keep an open mind, I must keep my eyes open. I must have broad horizons in order to notice what's going on, to notice when and where life might offer me a hidden possibility for finding meaning.

That is vital. Instead of idolization and instead of fixating on the idea that I must be a great scientist or my life will be meaningless; I must become this or that or my life is meaningless; I must have healthy children at any price. God forbid, if I give birth to a retarded child, then my life is meaningless because the life of this child is meaningless. That is not the way forward. We have to stay flexible; we have to remain resilient. We must be grateful for what life has to offer, one way or another. As my friend the late Paul Polak* summarized it so beautifully, "You can't set life any conditions."

We are talking about life and its meaning. I speak as a doctor; I speak as a neurologist. Of course, I can't say what the meaning of life is. Besides, there isn't one meaning—just as I might ask a chess master, "Sir, tell me, please, what is the best chess move in the world?" He would laugh in my face. There is no such thing. It all depends on the very specific, concrete situation and the personality of the particular player and that of his opponent, and how they are involved in that specific game. So, there is no such thing. There is, of course, an ultimate meaning of life, but a law applies that I would like to summarize like this: the more all-encompassing the meaning of life that we are talking about may be, the less tangible it is, the more it evades at least an intellectual or rational attempt to grasp it with our limited, finite minds.

What is the relationship of this ultimate meaning, this final meaning, this "super-meaning," as I call it (this doesn't have anything to do with the supernatural, by the way, but just means "beyond our limited capacity for understanding")? What is the relationship of this super-meaning to the tangible meaning that speaks to me personally and that I try to extract from a given situation? This relationship is very simple. Think about when you're watching a film at the cinema. This film consists of hundreds of thousands or millions of individual frames. And each one of these frames, every single one of these scenes, has a certain meaning that you can grasp. However, you cannot grasp the film's ultimate meaning—it doesn't become apparent until the end. In other words, the ultimate meaning, the big picture, can at best appear to us when we are lying on our death bed. And in spite of this, it could never have been fulfilled, we could never have realized that ultimate meaning if we had not tried to fulfil the meaning of each individual scene of our lives, every single situation in our lives, to the best of our knowledge or ignorance, to our best knowledge and belief. So that is the relationship between the all-encompassing but elusive ultimate meaning and the specific, personal "shaping of meaning" (since the way we grasp meaning boils down to our perception of "Gestalt," elements in the sense of [Kurt] Koffka, [Wolfgang] Köhler and Wertheimer's Gestalt psychology, which has hardly anything to do with so-called Gestalt therapy—and I'm not the only one who dares to say that, it's also the view of [Max] Wertheimer, the founder of Gestalt psychology).

Now, you don't have to imagine this meaning from a specific situation that speaks to us, or even calls to us, as being something grandiose. I am still talking about the transience of our existence, in other words about the imperative to actualize precisely these fleeting, transitory possibilities for fulfilling meaning. I am still on the subject, albeit by way of a thousand detours. As I said, this meaning does not have to be in any way grand. Let me cite a specific example from a little book about the meaning of life by Bishop Georg Moser. He tells of a dustman who, some years ago, had been awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. This dustman searched through the rubbish bins and household waste to find discarded toys, repaired them in the evenings and then gave them to needy children. With his talent for crafting, he managed to extract a second meaning from his job: exemplary, quite plain and simple, and modest, but effective—socially effective—and most of all, meaningful.

Now, it's not only through activity that we can obtain meaning from life, but also through experiencing something, and, as I mentioned earlier, through love—so, experiencing *something* or experiencing *someone*, and experiencing someone in their uniqueness and singularity means loving them.

But what does that look like in everyday life? Well now, I would particularly like to talk about old people again. In front of me, I have a letter from a woman, who writes: "In 14 days' time I will be 87 years old. And for me, every day is a gift, and one must be grateful for every gift. You see, Doctor, I can look up at the sky, look down at the glorious park, I can talk to the trees, I can welcome my friends to my home in the afternoons. Saying yes to everything, to everything, that's what counts. You know why most people find this so hard to understand? Doctor, I am deaf. But I can talk in my mind. I can hardly walk. But I can think. And my gratitude for this knows no bounds."

A simple letter, very unassuming. This woman is already dead. She had no idea that one day I would use her words. She didn't have any grand aspirations. But that's what life is like—as with the dustman, whose achievements only live on in his Federal Order of Merit and in the ten lines in the book by Bishop Moser.

I would like to read you two or three sentences from a second letter. It's from a prisoner who had set up a therapeutic self-help group in prison in Florida and recently reported that, out of 20 members of this group who help each other to get over their criminality, only one person had relapsed (and even he has now been released). This man wrote to me a short while ago, "I was hospitalized in the oncology unit for 11 weeks. I had a lung adenoma diagnosed. Most luckily, I found a part-time job on the ocean." He had found a job as a dishwasher at a restaurant by the sea. And then he writes: "I enjoy the sunrises and sunsets. How very beautiful life is!" This is what he writes, a man who has been sentenced to death—not sentenced to death in a prison in Florida, but sentenced to death by his cancer cells, by his lung cancer, a man at the end of his life. How very beautiful life is!

Now, do you see what I mean? Not only by doing a deed or completing a work, but also by experiencing and loving, can we squeeze meaning out of life and become aware of opportunities to find meaning. That's my opinion. But this man has actually written it. It is now flesh and blood. That's how life is; these are not empty phrases, these are not abstract things—these are

things that have been lived by real people. And he is in a hopeless situation, and yet that's what he writes. He has become the helpless victim of a hopeless situation, and still he finds meaning!

Even in this situation of an unavoidably tragic fate, we can find meaning by bearing witness to what man is capable of—in other words, by turning a personal tragedy into a triumph, and turning human suffering into an achievement. This is possible and it remains possible right down to our last breath. And this is the essence of what I call a *theory of meaning* that is therapeutically directed against a *lack of meaning*, against the deep feeling of meaninglessness we see nowadays.

But this theory or lesson of meaning—we logotherapists are not the ones teaching it; not even I am teaching it. Instead, our teachers are those from whom we have learned this lesson. And who are our teachers? They are our patients. They are the ones who have lived it, who have suffered it.

I have had the honor of being the head of a neurological hospital department for a quarter of a century. I have met young men who had been skiing a week earlier, who had been tearing along on their motorbikes a week earlier, and then were paralyzed in an accident. I know girls who, a week earlier, had been dancing at the disco, and then they got myelitis or a spinal cord tumor, and they will become progressively more disabled and will be bedridden for the rest of their lives. How they shape and master such a fate—that, I could tell you about for hours. We have learned from them what we are now trying to pass on to you.

"That is heroism," you may say, "and how can we demand heroism?" No one can demand heroism or even ask for it from anyone but themselves. But what we can very well do is refer to these examples, to these role models that show us how this suffering can be borne. And now, let me choose just one of these examples to show you: a couple of years ago, someone sent me an illustrated newspaper article. This young man—Jerry Long is his name—had read a book of mine, *Man's Search for Meaning*, and he wanted to tell me the following.

At 17 years of age, he had a diving accident and broke his neck. Since then, he has been at home, paralyzed from the head down, completely paralyzed. He can only move his head. He can type with a small wooden stick clamped between his teeth. With a particular movement that he can still make, by jerking his left shoulder, he can activate a telecommunications system that connects him with the university in Texas,

which is only a couple of miles away but which he cannot attend in person. He actively takes part in seminars, gives presentations, submits exam papers and studies psychology. And all because, as he writes, with his stick between his teeth, he can confirm what I assert in my book about finding meaning, even in suffering, and he would like to help other people. This is why he is studying psychology, and he is convinced that all the suffering that he is going through will ultimately serve to make him a better psychological counsellor.

And in another letter he wrote, word for word: “I view my life as abundant with meaning and purpose.” This is someone who has the face of a handsome young man—he is now 24 years old—but from there consists only of a skeleton that hangs from his head. The man weighs only about 30 kilos. Unbelievable. I have never seen anything like that in my life or in the many decades of my professional practice . . . and he is absolutely brimming with spirit!

A year ago, I met Jerry Long in person when he gave a lecture about his life at the University of Regensburg for the Third World Congress of Logotherapy. He gave his lecture the title “The Defiant Power of the Human Spirit”—it’s a term I coined but that I seldom use because it sounds so emotional—but it’s the reality! He shows, he lives the defiant power of the human spirit.

And in the latest letter he wrote to me, he says that he has already started his counselling. At various hospitals in Texas, he counsels seriously ill or dying people. And at the end, he says proudly that he has had notable successes. And in the very last sentence of his letter, he is not proud but humble, as he writes: “Accomplishments are not to be rested upon, but built upon.”

That’s Jerry Long.

Ladies and gentlemen, you will now ask, “So, in a word, Mr. Frankl, you imagine that suffering has meaning and that we can’t actually fulfil a meaning in life if we don’t suffer.” Nothing of the sort—I never said that! That would be masochism. Heroism would only be the case if the suffering were absolutely necessary. As long as I can remove the source of the suffering, I must do it. If it is a carcinoma and it is still operable, I must have the operation. If it is a psychological process such as a psychosis or neurosis, then it must be treated with targeted medication or with psychotherapy, where that is possible and necessary. And if the suffering

has a sociological cause, a political dilemma, then we must take political action in some permissible form. In any case, as long as we can and as soon as we can, we must remove the cause of the suffering.

What I am saying is not that suffering is necessary to find meaning and to fulfil meaning, but what I am saying once and for all is that fulfilling meaning is also possible where we are confronted with a state of suffering, albeit only when this suffering cannot be actively removed in any other way. In other words, the *priority* is to change the situation, to actively intervene; but, where this is not possible, the *superiority* (i.e., the ethical superiority within the value hierarchy) shifts to the possibility of a person seeing an opportunity for meaning and fulfilling it, in spite of suffering and precisely in the midst of this suffering. Life is potentially meaningful, *in extremis* and *in ultimis*, in the severest states of suffering, in the bleakest conditions and, finally, even until just before death.

Before I give you a specific example of this, I want to stress that these are not things that we are making up or that we have once found as an isolated case. These are things that have been precisely empirically proven in tests—for example, that the ability to find meaning, to recognize opportunities for meaning, is more pronounced in people who are close to death or who are in chronic situations of suffering, than in the average person. So, the ability to realize, “Wait, something could happen here. I could somehow, and maybe only through my attitude, prove what I am capable of, what human beings are actually capable of,” this ability, in fact, increases. The sensitivity to such possibilities increases with age, in severe states of suffering and especially before death, whose approach one is then aware of.

I would like to illustrate this with a letter I received decades ago. This is a letter from a bookkeeper who wrote to me shortly before her death from severe tuberculosis. “When has my life been richer? At the time when I was terribly useful as a bookkeeper and had so many duties I had no time for myself? Or in these last few years of intellectual engagement with a thousand problems? Even the struggle to overcome my fear of death that has tormented, hounded, and pursued me to an unimaginable extent, even this struggle seems to me to have been more worthwhile than a dozen balance sheets, no matter how fine.”

That is a true value hierarchy.

And perhaps I can read you some dialogue that we recorded of a patient who was, I think, 81 years old, had a metastasized carcinoma and knew that she would soon die. The following conversation took place in the lecture hall at the General Policlinic in Vienna.

FRANKL: What do you think of your long life when you look back on it today? Was it a good life?

PATIENT: Oh yes, Professor, I must say, it was a good life. My life really was good, and I must thank God for all that he gave me. I went to the theatre; I went to concerts and so forth. You see, I worked as a maid for a family in Prague for many years and they sometimes took me along to concerts. And you see, I am grateful for all those wonderful things. . . .

FRANKL: You speak of such lovely experiences. But that is all going to come to an end now, is it not?

PATIENT: (Pensively) Yes, yes, this will all come to an end.

FRANKL: How does that feel? Please describe it to me. Do you think that when this happens, all the wonderful things you have experienced will be removed from the world, will be obliterated?

PATIENT: (More pensively) These wonderful things I experienced . . .

FRANKL: Tell me, can anyone undo the happiness, that, as you say, you have experienced? Can anyone extinguish it?

PATIENT: You are right, Professor, no one can undo it.

FRANKL: Or can anyone erase the kindness that you have encountered in your life?

PATIENT: (More alert) No, no one!

FRANKL: And no one can erase what you have achieved and what you have gained.

PATIENT: You are right, no one can take that away.

FRANKL: Or can anyone take away what you have boldly and bravely endured? Can anyone remove all of that from the past, from the past into which you have rescued it, harvested it, and preserved it?

Now the patient is moved to tears and says: “No, no one can do that. No one.” After a while she says, “It’s true, I have suffered a lot. But I have also tried to absorb the blows that life has dealt me. Do you understand, Professor? I believe that suffering is a punishment, for I believe in God.”

FRANKL: But can’t suffering also be a test? Could it be that perhaps God wanted to see how you would bear the suffering? And in the end, maybe he had to admit: “Yes, she has borne it bravely.” And now tell me, what do you think, can anyone undo such achievements?

PATIENT: No, no one can.

FRANKL: They remain, don’t they?

PATIENT: Certainly, they remain.

FRANKL: You see, you haven’t just achieved all sorts of things in your life, you have also made the best of your life and your suffering. And because of that, you have become a role model for our patients in this department. I congratulate your fellow patients on the fact that they can take you as their example.

And in that moment, something happened that had never happened in any of my lectures before. All the students, and there were almost 200 of them, broke into spontaneous applause. “Look, this applause is for you, for your life, which was a single great achievement. You can be proud of your life. And how many people can really be proud of their lives? All I can say is, your life is a monument—a memorial that no one can ever erase from the world.”

The old woman slowly made her way out of the lecture hall. She died a week later. She died like Job, full of days. And in the last week of her life, she was no longer depressed. On the contrary, she was proud. Apparently, our conversation had shown her that even her own life had a meaning right up until the end. Before, the old woman was depressed, weighed down by the feeling that she had led a useless life.

Her last words, as entered verbatim in her case history by the attending doctor, were as follows: “My life is a monument, that’s what the professor said in front of all the students in the big lecture hall. So my life was not in vain.”

You can’t make up these things. Hearing these stories, you can only bow down in awe before such people and what they live through.

And now there is one last question: What happens when, for example, someone else dies and the transience of another human existence is at stake and at issue? Well, a famous urologist in the US, who led a World Congress in Montreal about psychology in the final stages of life, therefore in people who are dying, once wrote: “The end of life is always a time of unparalleled potential for personal and interpersonal growth for the patient and his family.” That’s true. They can experience inner growth from the suffering that is inflicted on them by the experience of a loved one dying or who has already died.

The following story from one of my books may confirm that. People keep coming to me to say how much this story helped them when they

found themselves in a similar situation. This is the story of an elderly doctor, this old GP, who came to me because he could not get over the death of his wife, whom he loved more than anything. And he said to me: “I know, you cannot help me either. Tranquilizers? I can prescribe them myself. I wanted to talk to you.”

What could I say to him? I simply asked him, “Tell me, what would have happened if you had died first instead of your wife?” And he said, “It would have been terrible for my poor wife, how she would have suffered!” And so, I had no choice but to say, “You see, my dear Doctor, your wife has been spared this suffering. But you will admit that it is you who have spared her, because you must take this suffering upon yourself.”

In that moment, there was a Copernican revolution. All at once, this man saw in his suffering, in his sorrow, the meaning of the sacrifice that he owed his wife. He would rather outlive her and grieve for her than the other way around.

You see, this is paradigmatic, a pure improvisation, a Socratic dialogue, if you like. But others can do this too. I have in front of me a report from Dr. Elisabeth Lukas. She is a logotherapist who runs a large therapy center in Munich and who wrote the following in one of her lectures, and later in a book.*

> A Swiss couple came specially to see me in Munich. They had already been to six Swiss psychiatrists without success. A year ago, the couple had lost their only son (and heir to their farm) in a car accident. Since then, the husband had declined into a state of complete passivity, let the farm go to rack and ruin, talked to no one and occasionally only remarked that everything was pointless now anyway, and he may as well blow his brains out. The husband sat there stony-faced and unresponsive at my table.

Dr. Lukas knew that nothing would get through to him except one thing. So, she asked him, “Tell me, if there was something you could still do for your son, would you be prepared to do it?” The man looked up and nodded. “I would do anything for him.”

“There is something,” continued Dr. Lukas, “that no one else but you can do for him. You see, until now, the death of your son has brought only unhappiness. You are sick with pain, the farm is run down, your wife is in despair. All the good that your son wanted to achieve in life has been halted by his death, unless something good can come from his death. Something

that can make his life and death meaningful, retrospectively meaningful. But he is relying on the fact that someone else will be able to carry this good work forward for him—his father, for example."

"The man's eyes filled with tears," wrote Dr. Lukas. "How can anything good come from his death?" he whispered. But he had to find the answer to that for himself. Dr. Lukas could only point him in the right direction, and said, "Let us imagine that you cultivate your land again and open your house to hikers or those in need. You will be able to tell everyone who asks, amazed, where your compassion comes from: 'This is in memory of my son. He passed away at a young age, but I want people to remember him with joy and gratitude.'"

At these words from Dr. Lukas, for the first time in a year, the man buried his head in his hands and cried bitterly for half an hour. Then he stood up and helped his wife with her coat. "Let's go home," he said to her. "We have neglected a lot of things."

This man was given back to life. That's the story of a logotherapy consultation, a unique session, a unique conversation between Dr. Elisabeth Lukas and this father.

And now, to come back to transience, perhaps you will say, "We live in a society in which *usefulness* is in demand, not the meaning of life, not the *value* of life." I have tried to show you that the meaning of life is, as far as possible, unconditional—right down to the last breath. I would now like to demonstrate that the value of a human being is just as unconditional (this runs in parallel). The value of a human being is unconditional insofar as it is not dependent on the usefulness that someone may have or may no longer have, but there is dignity there—this unconditional value of a human being. This dignity is not based on the person's present usefulness in the social sense, in the functional sense, but is based on the past values that he has created, that he has brought into the world, that he has actualized. And this dignity remains with him right until his very last breath; it is indestructible, and no one can take it away. Of course, this is difficult for us to understand today, in a society that is performance-oriented and which, accordingly, also worships youth—it's hard to grasp. Such people tend to regard with disdain an old man who is unable to function, who may no longer be useful, which, of course, has tremendous psycho-hygienic dangers. Just imagine that such a person grows old himself, if he is lucky. Well, he's at the bottom of the heap, crushed by his feelings of inferiority, because he's saying to himself,

“I’m good for nothing, how can my life still be meaningful?” He is potentially suicidal because he has also lost his self-esteem.

But in reality, such people only have their own inconsistency, their personal inconsistency, to thank if they are not advocating euthanasia measures in the sense Hitler applied. For in this sense, all senile, all mentally deficient, all demented and also all sterile people would have to be exterminated because their lives would be worthless according to this value hierarchy. And, ladies and gentlemen, I know all about euthanasia! I spent enough time putting my neck on the line to sabotage Herr Hitler’s euthanasia program, together with Professor Otto Pötzl, the National Socialist Party candidate, who made common cause with me there. Together, we succeeded in sabotaging euthanasia in hundreds of cases. However, people who think like that, who do not recognize dignity as an absolute, unconditional human value but only recognize usefulness, usefulness for a society that worships false gods—these people are at risk not only in their future when they grow old themselves, but also in the present, because they would actually have to advocate euthanasia.

An old person does not even need pity. Young people should actually be envious of old people! Why? For the simple reason that the young person will say that he has opportunities in the future—“Thank you very much,” says the old person, “but I don’t have opportunities; I have realities, and these don’t exist in some questionable future, but in my lived past. And no one can rob me of that.”

On that note, we come back to our starting point. An old person who thinks like this knows what’s important. He knows that the meaning of life is potentially an unconditional one, and the worth of a human being is also potentially unconditional. Such a person is like a man who stands in front of his calendar on the wall. There are people who tear a page from the calendar each day and wistfully watch as the calendar gets thinner and thinner from day to day as, with every day, their life slips by.

But the other man I have in mind resembles a different type of person, who every day tears off a page from the calendar, turns it over and makes notes on the back, diary notes—what he did that day, what he experienced, what he created on that day, what he may have bravely endured on that day. And, proudly, he puts those notes aside—just like an old man, just like I am doing now—and I thank you for your attention.

* Transcribed and edited by Franz Vesely-Frankl, April 2022. Courtesy of the Viktor Frankl Archive.

* The German, “Nichts ist umsonst, was du erstritten, was du geliebt, was du erlitten,” is a paraphrase of lyrics from Gustav Mahler’s Symphony No. 2.

* American neurosurgeon Harvey Cushing (1869–1939), who is regarded as the father of modern neurological surgery.

* Luis Trenker Trail in Tyrol, Austria, named after the author, mountaineer, director, and actor (1892–1990).

* Von Eckartsberg (1932–1993) was a professor of social psychology and hermeneutic phenomenology.

* Polak (1933–2019) was a psychiatrist and entrepreneur.

* Elisabeth Lukas, *Psychologische Seelsorge. Logotherapie—die Wende zu einer menschenwürdigen Psychologie* [*Psychological Pastoral Care. Logotherapy—the turning point towards a humane psychology*], Verlag Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau, 2 editions 1985–1988; new edition: 2 editions 1993–1996. Completely revised new edition under the title *Rendezvous mit dem Leben. Ermutigungen für die Zukunft* [*Rendezvous with Life. Encouragements for the Future*], Verlag Kösel, Munich, 3 editions 2000–2006. Reissued under the same title by Verlagsgemeinschaft topos plus, Kevelaer, 2 editions 2015–2016.

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2

Ways of Finding Meaning

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The following text, "*Man Alive*—Viktor Frankl," is the transcript of an interview that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation conducted with Viktor E. Frankl in 1977 on the television show *Man Alive*.* The interviewer was Roy Bonisteel. In it, Frankl vividly explores the question of meaning, and what role suffering can play, in relation to his concentration camp experiences, although suffering does not necessarily need to play such a role, since it is not a pre-condition for meaning.

MAN ALIVE—VIKTOR FRANKL

ROY BONISTEEL: Dr. Frankl, you spent three years in four concentration camps during the war. Can you describe to me how you found meaning in life, how you found life worthwhile after that kind of experience?

FRANKL: My American publishers circulated the story that I came out of Auschwitz with a new brand of psychotherapy, with a new system or the like. There is a mistake involved: I *entered* Auschwitz with my first book's full-length manuscript hidden in my pocket. And in this very manuscript—which later was published in America under the title *The Doctor and the Soul*—I developed the idea of the unconditional meaningfulness of life. So, the idea that life is meaningful and remains meaningful under any conditions was something I had got *prior* to my concentration camp experiences. So I might say, this idea, this conviction of the unconditional meaningfulness of life was retained, it survived the camp experience, it is still a conviction, *in spite of* the suffering and all the dying around us in the concentration camp. And the concentration camp itself was serving, functioning, in a sense, merely as a testing ground to confirm—experientially and experimentally as it were—the *justification* of my conviction.

BONISTEEL: So, it confirmed your conviction. But you saw people in there who obviously didn't have meaning in their lives? Tell me about the ones who survived and the ones who were different—how did it confirm your theory?

FRANKL: The lesson you could learn in Auschwitz and in other concentration camps, in the final analysis, was: those who were oriented toward a meaning, toward a meaning to be fulfilled by them in the future, were most likely to survive. And this has been confirmed afterwards by American Navy and Army psychiatrists—in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps,

in North Korean prisoner-of-war camps, recently in North Vietnamese prisoner-of-war camps. At US International University in San Diego, California, last year during the winter term, when I was serving on the faculty, as it happened, I met those three American officers who had been for the longest period of time in North Vietnamese prisoner-of-war camps—up to about seven years. And we improvisingly set up a panel; and they really confirmed what I had said in my report on the concentration camp experience, *Man's Search for Meaning*, they reconfirmed it in essence: that the orientation towards the future—towards a task, a personal task, waiting for them to be fulfilled in their future; or another person whom they were loving, to be met again, to be reunited with again in the future—this was what was decisively upholding these people. The question was not just survival, but there had to be a *why* of survival. The question was survival *for what*; unless there was some*thing* or some*one*, a personal cause for whose sake to survive, survival was scarcely possible.

BONISTEEL: Most of us have never been in the concentration camp experience. We've never had to go through that horror and tragedy and so one would think that today, it would be easier to find meaning in life—and yet, I sense that it's more difficult, in a sense, today than it was in years past. Do you think that?

FRANKL: You are absolutely right.

BONISTEEL: Why is that?

FRANKL: Because we are living in a society—either in terms of an affluent society or in terms of a welfare state as we in Austria are living in—anyway, these types of societies virtually satisfy, or at least they are out to satisfy and gratify, each and every human need, except for one need—the most basic and fundamental need operant in man: the need for meaning. Consumer societies, they are even creating needs, but the need for meaning—or, as I call it, the *will to meaning*—remains unfulfilled. It is what I now call the *unheard cry for meaning.*

On the one hand, society is frustrating man's will to meaning; on the other hand, psychology is neglecting this fact. If you go through the current motivation theories, you will find scarcely any reference to what is the most fundamental and basic concern of man: neither pleasure nor happiness, nor power nor prestige, but originally and basically his wish, his desire to find and fulfil a meaning in his life or, for that matter, in each single life situation confronting him. And if there is a meaning to fulfil, if he is aware, if he becomes cognizant of such a meaning, then he is ready to suffer, he is ready to offer sacrifices, he is ready to undergo tension, stress and so forth—without any harm being done to his health.

But if there is no meaning available, no meaning in his visual field, then he *takes* his life. I was recently confronted with the statistics from an American university, regarding 60 students who had tried to commit suicide . . .

BONISTEEL: Very high . . .

FRANKL: They were screened afterwards psychologically, and it turned out that 85 percent told the doctors the reason for their attempt was that they couldn't find a meaning in life. And among them, 93 percent were psychologically and physically healthy, in good family relationships, in good economic conditions, and with satisfying academic records and grades and so forth.

BONISTEEL: This is what I hear. I spend quite a bit of time with young people, in their teenage years, and a lot of them say they're just simply bored. They're bored with school, they're bored with their parents, they're bored with life, and what—I guess you would say, what is the meaning of life?

FRANKL: Neither parents nor school teachers are courageous enough to challenge them: don't arouse tensions, don't create tensions; don't put stress on them. But even Hans Selye,* the man in Montreal who created the concept of stress, recently has published a paper in which he says stress is the salt of life; man needs tensions. I would say, more cautiously, that what he needs is *a sound amount of tension.* Not too much tension, not too little tension, but a dosage, a sound healthy dosage of tension, such as that tension which is established in a polar field in which one pole is represented by a man and the other pole by that unique and specific meaning which is waiting for him to be fulfilled by him, and exclusively by him.

BONISTEEL: So, we shouldn't be too upset about all the stresses and anxieties in our life. We shouldn't . . . well, presume I come and say, "Look, Doctor, how do I deal with all the anxieties and stress of my life?"

FRANKL: Can you imagine a situation for a human being which is *more* full of stress than Auschwitz? And yet virtually all neurotic symptomatology *disappeared* in Auschwitz. And the degree to which suicide took place, in Auschwitz and Dachau, was astonishingly low, according to whoever wrote books—psychiatrists writing books on the psychology and psychopathology of concentration camp life.

And on the other hand, in the welfare state of Austria, a teacher showed me a list of questions his students were allowed to ask him, written up without any inhibition, without giving their names, absolutely anonymously. And the spectrum of questions ranged from the question, "Does life exist on other planets or not?" up to drug addiction, sexual problems and so forth. And you know what was *top ranking* on the list, as to the frequency of the questions? Suicide! Among youngsters of 14 to 15 years of age, in a welfare state such as Austria—suicide! There were virtually no stress or tensions, because they are pampered, nobody allows himself to challenge them. What young people need are ideals and challenges, personal tasks and—in the first place—examples, personal examples; but not the cowards, the cowardly people who don't venture to confront them with anything because they might become angry because they are challenged.

BONISTEEL: I did an interview last year with Metropolitan Anthony [Bloom, Bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church] of London, and he said exactly the same thing as you're saying.

He was a doctor during the war, and he treated survivors of concentration camps. He had had a very rough life. And he said the only time in his life, his personal life, he ever considered suicide was later on, when he became rather well-off and affluent.

FRANKL: This is well-known. I have compared this to deep-sea fish, which, when they are brought up to the surface of the sea, are "deformalized" as it were. And this is also the greatest danger to divers—they must very slowly be brought up to an area of less tension, of less pressure. It is well-known among neurologists and psychiatrists that placing too-high demands on people is less dangerous than placing too few demands on them. People are today not "overdemanded," they are "underdemanded."

BONISTEEL: Another thing that occurs to me, though, is that we can always find meaning in some of the traditional institutions we have going for us, the church, for example, or the family. And these institutions seem to be diminishing. They have less importance, it seems to me, in our lives today. And this would frustrate our search for meaning, it seems.

FRANKL: You are right in several respects. First of all, what I have described already 30 years ago, and predicted and foreseen, I might say: the emergence—and today the presence—of what I call the *existential vacuum*; the feeling of meaninglessness; the feeling of emptiness; a sense of futility which now takes the place of inferiority feelings; the existential frustration which now takes the place of sexual frustrations, in contrast to the times of Sigmund Freud. Now, this mass neurosis, meaninglessness, is to be explained, as I see it, mainly in two directions. First, in contrast to an animal, man is not told by drives and instincts what he simply *must* do. Furthermore, in contrast to man in former times, today he is no longer told by the traditions and traditionally and universally held values what he *should* do. Now neither knowing what he must do nor what he should do, he sometimes seems no longer to know what he basically *wishes* to do. And what is the consequence? Either he just wishes to do what other people are doing—this is *conformism;* or else he just does what other people wish him to do—and this is *totalitarianism.*

Now, this is the origin of the existential vacuum. But you see, since traditions are on the wane, traditions are crumbling—not only in the field of religion, but generally—those people who are most affected by this loss of traditional values are naturally the youngsters. And this can be evidenced. There are four tests, logotherapeutic tests, developed by former students of mine. With these you can measure the degree of meaning orientation, the degree of one's will to meaning dominating one's life and, on the other hand, also the existential frustration, the frustration of this will to meaning, one's feeling of meaninglessness. And it was evidenced by several empirically based, statistically based research projects that youngsters, in fact, are *most* afflicted by the sense of emptiness and meaninglessness. So, you were right on intuitive grounds, as has been tested by my students.

BONISTEEL: But in terms of our traditional values and our religious institutions on the wane, as we say—can one find meaning in life without a faith in God?

FRANKL: You see, I said before, there is an unconditional meaningfulness of life. I've not yet had an opportunity to buttress . . .

BONISTEEL: Go ahead.

FRANKL: . . . this, my personal conviction. But, anticipatingly, I would like to say that meaning can be found by each and every person—also by a person who is not religious. I would concede personally that it is easier to find meaning in life if you are a religious person. But, on the other hand, I would have to add, to push forward immediately by adding, that you cannot command, you cannot order anyone to believe.

BONISTEEL: I see . . .

FRANKL: Belief, or faith, must grow within yourself—organically. You have to let it grow; you just shouldn't contribute to the repression of faith. But in principle each and every person can find a meaning in life. And this again has been empirically corroborated. I have at home a list of 17 authors, people who have written their dissertations on this subject—among them two, as it happens, from the University of Ottawa. And to sum up what has been evidenced empirically by tests and statistics, as I said before, is that meaning can be found by each and every person, irrespective of his age; irrespective of his sex; irrespective of his educational background; irrespective of his IQ; irrespective of his personal character structure or psychological make-up; even irrespective of environment—just think of Auschwitz, of prisons, and of people who are very successful and get bored. And finally, it turned out that meaning is available to man in principle, irrespective of whether or not he is religious—and if he is religious, to which denomination he belongs. And remarkable enough: the last findings I mentioned—for them, we are indebted to priests who were empirically making research in psychological university departments.

BONISTEEL: Let's explore just for a moment how we find that meaning. Let's say that I'm just an average sort of chap, I have never been through the concentration camp, so I haven't been tested through suffering. For example, I live a very comfortable life; perhaps I don't have a belief in God, maybe I'm bored with my job, maybe I'm bored with my family. But you say I can still find meaning in my life. And it's important I find it. Where do I find it? What do I latch on to? I mean, I'm just suggesting we may have viewers who are going through this.

FRANKL: I have already elaborated on this many times: there are three main avenues, as it were, leading up to meaning fulfilment. The first way, the first road on which you may arrive at meaning to find and to fulfil, is through work, through creating a work or doing a deed. Second, through love, through experiencing someone in his very uniqueness—and this means loving. Love is more than just sex; on the contrary, human sex is more than mere sex—precisely to the extent to which it serves as a bodily incarnation, I may say, a mode of expression, the physical mode of expression of one's love, of a personal togetherness, of getting hold of another person in his very uniqueness—and seizing the

uniqueness of another person is equivalent to, is the very definition of love. And you may enrich your inner life also through experiencing *something*—culture, nature, art or whatever; through research, through experiencing *something* or encountering *someone* in his very uniqueness—in other words, through love. Work and love are the main avenues leading up to meaning. *But,* if need be, if you are confronted with a fate you no longer can change, if you are confronted, say, with an incurable disease, with an inoperable cancer, *even then* you may find a meaning. You may even find the deepest possible, the highest conceivable, meaning, because you then have an opportunity to bear witness to the human potential at its best, the most human of all human capacities, which is to turn a tragedy into a personal triumph, to turn your predicament into an achievement on the human level. In other words, life is potentially meaningful literally up to one's last breath, to the last moment. Even *in extremis* and *in ultimis*, as the theologians would put it. This means: in extreme life situations—just think of Auschwitz—and up to the last moment. Let me quote no more or less than the title of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's latest book, *Death: The Final Stage of Growth.*

So, life is potentially meaningful under any condition. *The American Journal of Psychiatry* once wrote up a review on a book of mine; and there, you will find this sentence: "Dr. Frankl's message is the belief, the unconditional faith, in the unconditional meaningfulness of life." Right, but it's more than faith. When I was 15 years of age, I got this glimpse, this insight, just intuitively. But, lately, it has been corroborated on firm and solid empirical grounds, through factorial analysis of many thousands of questionnaires, of subjects being screened psychologically, the data being computerized and so forth. So, this is not something philosophical, suspended in the air. These are solid facts, and these are burning problems, problems burning under the fingernails of our youngsters.

BONISTEEL: So, we can find meaning in three ways, through work, love . . .

FRANKL: . . . and potentially in suffering. But only in suffering *if need be*—you remember, I said "if need be." To shoulder one's cross unnecessarily, to endure suffering which is unnecessary—this doesn't yield any meaning. If you can change a situation, you will have to. If a cancer can be treated with surgery, you have to undergo or perform surgery. But after all, man is a mortal being. We have to die, and before dying, we have ineluctably to suffer sometimes—as a medical doctor, I must confess this.

So, there is certainly no one who is spared unchangeable situations. It could be, perhaps for a couple of months, unemployment—and still, life retains a meaning. In the thirties, at the time of the worldwide economic crisis, I dealt extensively with youngsters caught in unemployment situations, and I found out that unemployment itself is not what was weighing heavily on their souls, but it was the mistake they had fallen prey to: the mistake that having no job means having no meaning, means being useless! And the moment I had these youngsters turn to some organizations—such as Father Tom's Youth Corps and so

forth [in order to work as volunteers, for example]—they had a meaning to fulfil, even without getting one cent, and the depression was gone! In other words, what we need, you see, is not bread alone. And what the unemployed need is not welfare alone, they need a meaning—and a meaning can be found everywhere, in the smallest hut.

On the other hand, you find people who are millionaires and billionaires, and they have no meaning—they kill themselves. My former assistant during a teaching period at Harvard, Rolf von Eckartsberg, showed in his dissertation that people, 20 years after graduation from Harvard, having made wonderful careers, being very successful, didn't find a meaning in their lives. And on the other hand, I can present to you heaps of letters which, due to unknown reasons, I always get from American prisons, letters to the effect: "Only here in prison, a few hundred yards from the electric chair, I have found, at last, found meaning in my life, only here!" And even more, people say, "I am happy, I have made peace with myself and my life, right here in prison, under these conditions!," so that now we might understand how I was justified in saying that meaning can be found irrespective of the environmental situation, of a given situation; it depends on yourself.

And it depends on whether or not you are exposed to an indoctrination—on American campuses or on analysts' couches—an indoctrination to the effect that man is nothing but a mechanism, that man is nothing but the outcome of conditioning or psychodynamic processes, that man is nothing but a computer. If you indoctrinate people along these lines, small wonder if they are purged of any enthusiasm or idealism. I recently had to address, as guest speaker, the annual meeting of the international PEN club—the international club of writers, novelists, playwrights and poets. And I implored these authors of novels and dramas and so forth, I implored them, "If you are not capable of immunizing your readers against nihilism and despair, please at least refrain from inoculating them with your own cynicism."

BONISTEEL: This is, it seems to me, part of the problem we face today, in this age we live in: the media and the writers of drama that we watch on TV, or read in the papers—they're not really using the kind of language that deals with what you are speaking of. They are using a language that's superficial, a kind of ephemeral language. We don't talk about this enough, do we?

FRANKL: You don't venture to confront people with their own inner vacuum and emptiness and meaninglessness. And instead of making your mass media—and *all* the facilities and potentialities inherent in them, available in them—instead of making them a therapy, you use them as the reflection of your own symptoms. And also, you think low, you think small of man, you see? What is necessary is to think great of man.

At my age of 72 now, a couple of years ago, I started taking flying lessons, whenever I was in California. And once, my flight instructor told me: "If you are starting here and wish to land there, and you have a cross-wind condition, you will fall prey to a drift and land

south of that place. So, you have to aim for a compass direction north of the place of destination; you have to embark on what we pilots call *crabbing.*"

And the same with man. If you see man only that high, you are corrupting him. He will deteriorate, he will become worse. He will drift, as it were, morally. But if you think of him high, then you make him arrive where he can be. In other words, "If we take man as he is, we make him worse. On the other hand, if we take him as he should be, we help him become what he can be." But this is no longer something my flight instructor has told me; this is a literal quotation from Goethe.

BONISTEEL: I'd like to ask you once more about suffering. I'm glad to hear that you feel we don't necessarily have to suffer in order to have meaning. Because in an interview I did with Elie Wiesel . . .

FRANKL: We just can make the best of suffering, if need be.

BONISTEEL: I was interested that Elie Wiesel said that suffering is contrary to his Jewish upbringing. He does not see suffering as a necessary part of life; as a matter of fact, it's a bad part of life, but you see value in suffering—to a certain extent . . .

FRANKL: First: the *potential* value; a value *offer,* a "meaning offer" you have to use. Second: not in each and every kind of suffering. There is a famous Jewish philosopher—who, incidentally, was the best and greatest friend of Franz Kafka, and has to be credited for the fact that Franz Kafka's works were not destroyed after Kafka's death—I speak of Max Brod. And Max Brod, in a relatively unknown philosophical book concerning Jewish philosophy—specifically Jewish philosophy—was differentiating between noble and unnoble suffering. Noble suffering is suffering that you are not spared and cannot change. Then you have to transcend it, you have to make the best of it, as I said before in trivial terms. You have to turn it into an achievement; and this achievement, then—if you have succeeded in bringing it about—this personal achievement is the highest possible achievement of a man. No animal can do anything like this. No animal asks the question of whether its life has a meaning or not. No animal is even capable of turning a predicament into an achievement—man alone. But if he does so, then he has reached the peak of whatever man is capable of.

BONISTEEL: Doctor, you very much underline the theme of our series: the title of the show is *Man Alive,* and it seems to me for man to be fully alive he has to find the kind of meaning that you're talking about. And yet there are people who go through life feeling, "Well, I can make out in this life, I can exist in this life, I can make do, because there is an afterlife, there is something better I'm going to." Yet he's not really living to his fullness here, is he?

FRANKL: Certainly not. But I would like to argue with such an individual. And I wouldn't on *a priori* grounds dismiss the justification of such a belief. But let me instead, in more positive terms, react to your question, by pointing out that, as I see it, we have to try to maintain the potential meaningfulness of life *in spite of its transitoriness.* So many patients have

confronted me with the question: “But, Doctor, after all, everything will be over. Everything is transitory. And then, what meaning will remain?”

And as I always say, what is transitory are only the potentialities, are only the opportunities to fulfil a meaning, be it by doing something, be it by loving someone, be it by shouldering courageously and honestly a suffering you cannot avoid, and even facing your death in a dignified manner—in your own style, as it were. But once we have actualized such a transitory potentiality, once we have used the opportunity to do a deed, to love someone, to give ourselves to a task or to another person, once we have used the opportunity to transcend our predicament and make it into a human achievement, then we have rescued all this meaning. We have rescued it into the past; we have safely delivered and deposited it in the past.

Nobody can deprive and rob us of what we have put into the past. The deed done, a love loved, a suffering honestly gone through, is something indelible. We usually see only the stubble field of the past. But what we don’t see, what we overlook, is the full barn, are the full granaries into which we have rescued our past, our deeds, our experiences, our sufferings—the harvest of our lives.

I found a formulation for this in the Book of Job, where it says, “You are going to your grave as a shock of corn is brought in, in its season.”

So, *the past* is the safest form of being. It is over; but, in the past, everything remains, we have eternalized everything. And rather than looking for a future life or an afterlife, I would say what is important is *the sense of personal responsibleness*, the feeling that I am responsible for what I am putting into the past—and then, after I have succeeded in so doing, nobody can undo what I have done. I wonder if I have made myself clear . . .

BONISTEEL: I understand. One other area, though, that you talked earlier about, about the involvement with each other, caring for another person, which would give meaning to life—loving another person: we see in our society today that we’ve become very individualistic, very materialistic. There’s also a society, and I’m thinking of the Chinese society, where they are concerned about each other, they work for the community, for the state, so perhaps this is how they find meaning.

FRANKL: For the future of the nation.

BONISTEEL: For the future of the nation. Is this a preferable system?

FRANKL: You see, many years ago, I once was lecturing at one of the American universities, and a Freudian stood up in the question-and-answer period and told me, “Dr. Frankl, I just returned from Moscow. And I must say I now understand what you mean: in America, we are too much concerned—we are, as it were, cultivating our neuroses, and we are idolizing psychoanalysis. The incidence, the occurrence of neurotic illness behind the Iron curtain is much lower; and I think this is due to the fact that they, over there, have tasks to complete.”

And then, a year later, I was lecturing behind the Iron Curtain myself, at a communist university, among communist psychiatrists. I told them this story, and they were smugly smiling—but I told them, “Please don’t smile too early. It’s true, over here you might have more tasks to complete, but, you know, the Americans have retained their freedom to choose their tasks.” How beautiful it would be to synthesize, to combine *having a task* and the *freedom to choose* one’s task.

Anyway, you have rightly put your finger on the fact that what an individual, a human being, needs is what I like to call “self-transcendence.” That is to say, being concerned with oneself or one’s own prestige, or one’s own happiness, is self-defeating. Forgive my contradicting the American Declaration of Independence, in which you find the phrase “pursuit of happiness.” I deem that “pursuit of happiness” is a contradiction in terms, because happiness can never really be *pursued.* Happiness must *ensue*; happiness is a side effect, happiness is a by-product and must remain a by-product of meaning fulfilment, of your dedication to a task, a cause greater than yourself, or a person other than yourself.

And this becomes most conspicuous in sexual neurosis, where precisely to the extent to which someone is hunting, chasing, pursuing sexual happiness or pleasure, he is doomed to failure. Be it a male patient who wishes to demonstrate his sexual potency—to the same extent, he is likely to wind up with impotence. A female patient, precisely to the degree to which she wishes to demonstrate to herself that she is fully capable of orgasm—precisely to that extent, she winds up with frigidity. On the other hand, the more you give yourself, the more you forget yourself, in love or in work, for the sake of a cause to serve or a person to love, to that very extent, you will become happy—precisely by *not* caring for happiness, precisely by overlooking and forgetting whether you are happy or not. It is the same with our eyes. Our eyes’ capacity to do their job, which is to perceive visually the surrounding world, ironically enough is contingent on the eye’s *in*capacity to see itself. When does my eye see itself, or anything of itself? When I’m afflicted with glaucoma, I see rainbow halos around the lights, then my eye perceives its own glaucoma. If I am suffering from a cataract, I see a cloudiness. This cloud is something which my eye sees, perceives *of itself.* Normally, an eye doesn’t see itself, but the world; and the more it sees, really sees, of itself, the more its visual function is impaired. It’s the same with man. Man becomes himself, man is actualizing his self, man is *human* precisely to the extent to which he is not concerned with himself or anything within himself, but is living out his self-transcendence —in that he is serving a cause, fulfilling a meaning or loving another human being.

BONISTEEL: Well, you know Doctor, I’m not a psychiatrist, nor am I a theologian. And yet it seems to me that there is an awful lot of religion in this logotherapy that you talk about. What is the difference between logotherapy and religion?

FRANKL: A great difference. Because the aim of any psychotherapy, as a secular methodology, is to offer mental health, while the aim of the pastor, priest or rabbi is not primarily any

mental hygiene. But, even at the price of arousing more tensions, he will wrestle like Jacob did with the angels, with that person for the sake of salvation or whatever you call it. There is a lot of difference! And you must understand that as the one who happens to have created that system called logotherapy and as a psychiatrist, I have to see to it and stick to it that, say, logotherapy is available to *each and every* person and patient—that it must be available to the religious patient as well as to the irreligious one. And more than that: that it must be usable in the hands of each and every doctor or therapist, the agnostic as well as a religiously oriented person. Because, otherwise, I would contradict the Hippocratic oath that I had to swear, to the effect that I am available for each and every suffering being. And so I cannot discriminate between religious and irreligious people.

BONISTEEL: No, it is just that you use so many religious terms as you talk, not necessarily language, but your phrases have a religious connotation.

FRANKL: For instance?

BONISTEEL: Well, that you have to care for the other person, not yourself; that you don't pursue happiness—it'll come to you . . .

FRANKL: This is something human. This is an anthropological fact, not a theological issue! I made it explicit that, to the extent to which you are forgetting yourself by giving, you are human. Now, is it a religious issue if I evidence this in cases of male impotence or female frigidity?

BONISTEEL: (Laughs) No.

FRANKL: Small wonder. Why shouldn't the theologians for several thousand years have become cognizant and aware of human fact? But still they are human facts. The theologians put them in a broader view; they add another dimension. But the religious dimension is something we psychiatrists are not allowed to enter. We would immediately weaken our message, because people would say, "Now he starts preaching." But as long as I can corroborate my conviction in the way of confirmation on empirical grounds, you cannot just dismiss it and do it away as inspirational thinking or writing. And this is very important today.

It might be religious in the long run, but implicitly and unintentionally—all the better for religion, for both religion and psychotherapy! But the distinction has to be made. One must not confound the dimensions. There are so many theologians dabbling in the field of psychiatry that I wouldn't like to contribute to such confusion by starting dabbling in the field of theology.

BONISTEEL: (Laughs)

FRANKL: And you, on this continent, you are guru-fying psychiatrists. You expect them to have the answers. We psychiatrists don't have *the* answers. The meaning of one's life has to be determined by each individual himself; nobody can take off his shoulders the "wrestling" with this question: What is the specific meaning of my life? He might be aided

by his personal conscience—provided he is listening carefully to his conscience. But no psychiatrist can take this over, no psychotherapist is allowed or entitled to impose any value system or meaning direction on the patient.

But there's also no need—we psychiatrists don't even know up to today, say, what the real cause of schizophrenia is—even less what the true cure for schizophrenia is. We are not omniscient. Even less are we omnipotent.

The only divine attribute we may claim for ourselves is that we are *omnipresent*, we are on each show, we are on *Man Alive* shows and so forth; we are everywhere! But you, particularly—forgive me for speaking out—but particularly you Americans should stop *divinizing* psychiatry, and you should rather start *re-humanizing* psychiatry.

BONISTEEL: Thank you very much! I realize, as you say, it's up to each and every one of us, no matter who we are, where we are or what conditions we are in.

You've told us what we can do, and I thank you so much for being on our program.

FRANKL: Thank you.

BONISTEEL: Dr. Frankl, young people today seem particularly to have trouble finding goals and purpose in life. Why this generation particularly of young people? And what would you say to them?

FRANKL: First of all, this is no neurosis; this is no illness, but this is a manifestation of the best available in man, the best observable in man: intellectual honesty and sincerity.

If one doesn't simply take over, out from the hands of tradition, the answers to one's question, "What is the meaning of my life?" then this, after all, speaks in a certain sense in favor of this individual. But you see, if someone is not only questing for a meaning to his life but even questioning that *there is* such a meaning, he should, if he is courageous enough not to rely on traditions but to find an answer of his own, he should match this personal *courage* with *patience.* Rather than taking his life because of despair, he should be able patiently to wait—sooner or later, meaning might dawn upon him. But the aftermath, the side effects, of this despair so much spread among youngsters is a crisis which sometimes is erroneously referred to in terms of illness or madness. I remember that once, I was invited by the student body of an American university to speak to them; and they insisted that the title be, "Is the new generation mad?" Now, I couldn't change the title, so I had to take this challenge. And when I had to take a taxi to that university, the driver asked me, "What are you going to speak on?" I said, "Is the new generation mad?" He was laughing. "Don't laugh," I said. "I make you a proposal. I take over your car and you take over my lecture." "Oh, I couldn't do that." I said, "I come from Vienna, and you certainly have your finger much more on the pulse of the psyche of the time than me." And he said, "I still couldn't do that." I then asked him: "Frankly tell me, what is your opinion, is the new generation mad?" And you know what he said, as if it were shot out of a pistol? "Of course they are mad—they kill themselves, they kill each other, and they take dope!"

By this, he had justly put his finger on the three aspects of the mass neurosis of today. *They kill themselves:* depression, up to suicide. Just consider the staggering suicide rates, particularly among the youngsters. In the United States today, among students, suicide is—next to traffic accidents—the most frequent cause of death.

First, depression; second, *they kill each other*: aggression. You have the staggering rates of juvenile delinquency, of violence! Third, *they take dope:* and there you have, after depression and aggression, addiction. The "mass neurotic triad," as I call it.

And there is evidence, empirical evidence, in the Western and Eastern world, and also in the Southern world [Africa], there is evidence that all these things are basically due to the widespread, worldwide feeling of meaninglessness pervading our culture and particularly the souls of our youngsters.

BONISTEEL: OK, you're giving us the description, and the prescription is to get meaningful—to find meaning in your life. You mentioned earlier about getting out of yourself. And I would suspect this is something teenagers could do, because they do tend to turn inwards, don't they? They're very self-conscious at that age—aware of themselves. How do they, and older people too, get out of themselves?

FRANKL: You see, there is also empirical evidence to the effect that teenagers are too much concerned with *self-interpretation* and *self-actualization.* Both, of course, are detrimental. They obviate what I call *self-transcendence.* You should, and may, actualize yourself. But you can actualize yourself only to the extent to which you turn outward! And even Abraham Maslow—the man who, more than anyone else, propagated and promulgated the concept of self-actualization—in his latest works before he died, was conceding and agreeing with my criticism: that self-actualization can never be aimed at as a target. If you aim at it, you are missing it. The same as with happiness, with pleasure and so forth.

Now, you cannot tell any patient, "Please, forget yourself." You know how he will wind up? The same way as the greatest philosopher of history, Immanuel Kant, did. Immanuel Kant once noticed that his servant was a thief, and he had to dismiss him. But he was very much accustomed to him, and so he wanted to forget him. You know what he did, the great philosopher? He wrote on a piece of paper, "Lampe"—this was the name of his servant—"Lampe must be forgotten." And he put the paper on the wall opposite his desk. Of course, in this way, he was *preventing* himself from forgetting Lampe. You cannot forget anything, least of all yourself, unless you are devoting yourself to a task, a concrete personal task. Also, the will to meaning cannot be elicited unless someone is elucidating a meaning, the meaning itself.

And this is most important because, otherwise, it's always the same as with the boomerang. When I was once giving a lecture at the University of Melbourne, Australia, they gave me a boomerang as a souvenir, a genuine boomerang. When it was handed over to me, I suddenly had what is called in psychology, according to Karl Bühler,* an "Aha!

Experience." Suddenly, I had the insight: this is the very symbol of human existence and the self-transcendent quality of human reality. Because generally it is assumed that it is the job of a boomerang to return to the hunter—but that's not true, the Australian told me. Because only that boomerang returns to the hunter which in the first place had failed to reach the target: the prey!

BONISTEEL: (Laughs)

FRANKL: The same with man. Only that type of person is so intent on themselves and so eager to contemplate and to observe themselves, to actualize themselves, to interpret themselves, who in the first place had missed—not a target but a mission in their life, who had not found a meaning outside of them, or a human being other than themselves. This is self-transcendence: not being primarily concerned with oneself, but something other than oneself—or, still better, *someone* other than oneself.

BONISTEEL: One more question—earlier, when we were talking, you used the phrase "the unconscious God." Just what do you mean by that?

FRANKL: It is the title of one of my latest books.* I thereby just refer to the fact, which I've come across ever more throughout my many years of psychiatric practice, that even irreligious people are, in their unconscious depth, religious—of course, in the broadest sense of the word. But once you subscribe to a statement once made by Albert Einstein, to the effect that having found an answer to the question for a meaning to life means to be religious; once you subscribe to a definition of religion in this broadest sense, you are justified to assume that each and every person, unconsciously and in a very universal way, may be religious. And sometimes you may also evidence that this—not only unconscious but repressed—religiousness may well result in certain forms of neurotic illness. So the belief of Sigmund Freud that religion is a neurosis of mankind may, in a way, be reversed, inasmuch as we may come across cases in which, on the contrary, a neurosis is the result of a repressed religious desire and longing in an individual.

But certainly, this should not entice anyone to now frantically embrace and espouse religion, and because institutionalized religion is, as it were, out of fashion, to follow each and every fad—and particularly, it's fashionable to embrace and espouse Eastern forms of religion. I have a lot of understanding and I am very sympathetic to Eastern mysticism and meditation techniques, but all that cannot be achieved and accomplished upon command, upon order, upon demands placed upon you—not even by will, but only spontaneously, as it were. And you should also not neglect the fact that Eastern religion, by and large, is different from our Western mind inasmuch as the Western mind, as far as it is oriented towards religion, is oriented toward a deeply personalized religion, you see, rather than an impersonal religion.

This fact becomes most conspicuous in the phenomenon of prayer. In prayer, you are addressing, you are speaking to an entirely and absolutely personal entity rather than just a

cosmic entity or being. I would say prayer is not a station-to-station but rather a person-to-person call, if I might say so. And this fact must not be neglected: that our Western minds are very much attached to a personal way of religion. The contrary to institutionalized religion is rather personalized religion—but both can be combined, and it is the responsibility of each thinking individual to come up with the synthesis of both. There is a place for personalized religion within institutional religion—and also vice versa.

But on the other hand, as long as you depict deity in terms of someone who is mainly and primarily concerned with having as many believers in him as possible—and at that, believers in the strict sense of a certain denomination—you will fail, you will not attract the religious depth or the deep religious feelings in an individual. He will rather become disgusted, because he conceives of God in a different way, as someone caring, as someone unconditionally loving him rather than someone who is eager to have the greatest number of believers in the strict sense. And that is why I think that one should do away and overcome the habit that one denomination is fighting or ridiculing or arguing against another denomination. You see, all of them, all these types of denominations or denominational activities, will lose in the long run. I am used to comparing—perhaps it's a sacrilege—comparing religions with languages.

BONISTEEL: How do you mean?

FRANKL: There are different languages; but no one can say that he is content that his own mother tongue is superior to other languages, simply because you may arrive at the truth in each language. You may err, go astray, in each language; you may even lie in each language. So there is no mutual superiority or inferiority, respectively. And the same holds for religion or the individual denominations. There simply cannot be any superiority. There's certainly one truth, I concede, I admit, but what I also would have to add is that *no one* is ever justified in contending that it is *he* and *he alone* in whose hands truth lies.

BONISTEEL: Thank you, sir. Thank you very much.

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* "*Man Alive*—Viktor Frankl," interview, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1977. First printed in the *International Journal of Logotherapy and Existential Analysis* 6, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1998). We thank the CBC for their permission to print this text here.

* Selye (1907–1982) was an endocrinologist.

* Bühler (1879–1963) was a psychiatrist and psychologist.

* *The Unconscious God*, originally published in 1943.

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The Crisis of Meaning and the Zeitgeist

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This article, “Collective Neuroses,” was published in the *Wiener Medizinische Wochenschrift* in 1955,* when Viktor E. Frankl was the head of the Neurological Department of the General Policlinic in Vienna. In it, Frankl describes the general social uncertainty and fear, as well as the feelings of purposelessness and existential emptiness, in the lives of many people at the time. Their symptoms, such as fatalism, fanaticism, and flight from freedom and responsibility, show parallels to today.

COLLECTIVE NEUROSES

In a letter to Hans Blüher* in 1923, Sigmund Freud spoke of “this upside-down time of ours.” But even today there is still a lot of talk about a “sickness of our times,” an illness of the zeitgeist, a zeitgeist pathology.** Might this sickness of our times be identical to the one that all psychotherapy is concerned with—neurosis? Has our time fallen sick with nervous tension? As it turns out, there is a book—the author’s name is F. C. Weinke—that is entitled *Der nervöse Zustand, das Siechthum unserer Zeit* (*The Nervous Condition, the Infirmity of Our Time*). This book was published in Vienna by J. G. Heubner in the year ’53—but not 1953; it was, in fact, 1853. In German, *Siechtum* [infirmity] was still written with the old-fashioned spelling “th” [*Siechthum*]. We can see that in terms of the relevance of neurosis, things have not changed all that much. It’s not just our own contemporaries who are nervous!

Johannes Hirschmann*** proved that neuroses have not increased, but in fact, in terms of their prevalence, have stayed the same for decades, and, among the various neuroses, the incidence of anxiety neuroses has in fact decreased. However, the clinical picture of the neuroses has changed, the symptomatology has altered, and as far as we can see, the incidence of fear and anxiety has in fact decreased.

Nevertheless, it is not just neurotic anxiety but anxiety per se that has not increased. [Julius] Freyhan has pointed out that past centuries, for example, the times of slavery, of religious wars, of witch burnings, of mass

migration and huge epidemics—that all these “good old days” cannot have been any more fear-free than our own time. Indeed, presumably people in earlier centuries felt more fear and had many more reasons to be afraid than we do in our own century. It seems that describing our era as “The Age of Anxiety” is actually off the mark.

Thus, we cannot conclude that nowadays there are more people with neurotic illnesses than before. The only thing that has increased is something rather different: the psychotherapeutic need of the masses to turn to a neurologist when they are in mental, moral or spiritual distress. But behind this psychotherapeutic need, there is probably something else, namely the ancient and perpetual metaphysical need of human beings. It is obvious that in a secularized century, spiritual and mental health will also be secularized. Today, people go to a psychiatrist with issues about which they would previously have gone to a priest, and that should in fact still belong to the realm of the priest. In these circumstances, the doctor, who has more or less been forced into the position of providing something akin to “medical spiritual care,” should therefore be very cautious in giving the patient any advice that should properly have come from a priest.

It is well-known that the percentage of endogenous psychoses has remained remarkably constant. The only thing that fluctuates is the number of admissions into institutions. But there are good reasons for this. For example, when, in 1931, at the Am Steinhof mental hospital in Vienna, there were 5,000 admissions (the highest number in more than 40 years)—whereas, in contrast, in 1942 there were 2,000 admissions, the lowest number—this is very easy to explain: in the 1930s, in the middle of the Great Depression, patients were left in the hospital for as long as possible by their relatives for understandable economic reasons. In fact, the patients themselves were often glad to have a roof over their heads and a hot meal in their bellies. The situation was completely different in the early 1940s. Because of the equally understandable and well-founded fear of being euthanized, sick family members were brought back home as soon as possible, or were discharged as early as possible—or, if feasible, were not placed in residential institutional care in the first place.

Not only has the clinical picture of neuroses altered and not only has their symptomatology changed, but we can also see similar trends with psychoses (Heinrich Kranz).* It has become evident that people who are ill with melancholia nowadays are less likely to suffer from feelings of guilt,

especially guilt before God. Rather, their main worries are about their job or their ability to work. These are the sources of melancholia today (A.V. Orelli)** but presumably only because they—not God and guilt but health and work—are the concerns of the average person nowadays.

Even the number of suicides has not significantly increased. Insofar as the suicide rate shows any fluctuations it decreases in times of economic hardship, but also in times of political crisis. This fact—which researchers [Émile] Durkheim and [Harald] Höffding have referred to—has recently been confirmed: not only that for decades Switzerland and Sweden have held the European record for suicide rates (i.e., precisely the countries that have enjoyed the longest periods of peace), but it has become apparent that in northern Germany since 1946 the suicide rate has been lower than in the Wilhelmine period. And another statistic, published by G. Zigeuner, concludes that in Graz, or rather, in Styria, the suicide rate between 1946 and 1947 reached a low point at exactly the time of a particularly large decline in the population's standard of living.

"The experience of two world wars," said Johannes Hirschmann,* has shown that under the extraordinary strain of hardship and fighting, the number of mentally ill people (especially schizophrenics) did not increase. Going by the research material we have worked with, this is probably also true of chronic neuroses—as far as neurotic disorders are concerned—that have been identified in the course of a pension application procedure. On the whole, apart from acute anxiety and shock syndromes, the particular environmental factors that operate in times of severe crisis do not appear to have a specific neurogenic effect. If this were the case, the number of neuroses would have shown a significant and measurable increase. The example of the prison camp would actually lead us to assume that coercion, threat, incarceration and brutal violence are more likely to inhibit the development of neuroses. Environmental factors—such as material deprivation, the lack of the most basic necessities, loss of livelihood, the misery of being a refugee, or being uprooted—do not have a significant measurable impact on the occurrence of neuroses. H. Schulte* also talks about "the side effect of all sociological emergencies, the well-known lower incidence of divorce, suicide, addiction and serious neuroses." You will find similar references in the work of E. Menninger-Lerchenthal** regarding suicide rates in politically unstable times. In my opinion, the best way to explain this is through an allegory: I once heard that an arch that has

become unsafe can be reinforced and stabilized, paradoxically, by increasing the load on it. It's a similar situation for human beings: when experiencing external difficulties, our inner strength and resilience apparently grows.

As for the etiology of the "sickness of our times," experts claim that it's the sheer *pace* of our lives that makes people so ill. The well-known sociologist Hendrik de Man, no less, states, "We cannot with impunity accelerate the pace beyond a certain limit." Well, the idea that people would not be able to tolerate a faster pace, say, the pace of mechanized travel—and that they would not be able to keep up with technical progress—is nothing new, but it was a false prophecy. When, in the nineteenth century, the first trains took to the rails, medical experts thought it impossible that the human body could endure the rapid acceleration experienced when travelling by train without falling ill. And until a few years ago, experts still had doubts about whether it was medically possible to fly at supersonic speeds in an airplane. We see—I mean, now we see, now that the skepticism and the prophecies have been proven wrong—how right Dostoevsky was when he defined man as a creature who can get used to anything. So, today's tempo cannot in any way be blamed for being the cause of this sickness of our times, or indeed the cause of any sickness. In fact, I would venture to declare that the accelerated pace of our lives today represents an attempt at self-healing, albeit a failed attempt at self-healing. Certainly, the frantic pace of our lives can be understood perfectly well if we comprehend it as an attempt to anesthetize ourselves. Every person is fleeing from an inner bleakness and emptiness and, during this flight, plunges into turmoil. The French psychologist Pierre Janet described what he called a *sentiment de vide* in neurotic individuals he had diagnosed as psychasthenic. This meant a feeling of emptiness and lack of content in life. Now, this feeling of emptiness also exists in a figurative sense, and by this I mean a feeling of existential emptiness, a feeling of the aimlessness and vacuousness of existence. The average person today experiences what could perhaps be most accurately characterized by changing a few words from *Egmont* by Goethe: he hardly knows where he came from—let alone where he is going. And we could add, the less he knows about the destination of his journey, the faster he travels along that road.

This feeling of existential emptiness, the feeling of the aimlessness and vacuousness of life, we have called *existential frustration*, arising from the

failure to fulfil an innate *will to meaning* that lies deep within us, and through which we as human beings are originally and ultimately motivated —not to say inspired—through a longing for the greatest possible fulfilment of meaning in our lives, so that we strive for a purpose in a life worth living, and wrest all this meaning from our lives.

We have compared this will to meaning with the will to power, which Alfred Adler rightly elucidates in his Individual Psychology in the form of a striving for recognition. And we have also compared the will to meaning with another "will," the will to pleasure, which Freud's psychoanalysis is so convinced is ultimately predominant in the form of the pleasure principle.

And we can see how, precisely at the point where the will to meaning is frustrated because it remains unfulfilled, the will to pleasure must step in and at least conceal the existential unfulfilledness of a person from his own conscience and numb his awareness of it. In other words, the will to pleasure only appears on the scene when the person's will to meaning has been thwarted; only then does the person start to be subordinated to the pleasure principle as defined in psychoanalysis. Sexual libido only proliferates in an existential vacuum! If someone experiences a disappointment, such as an existential disappointment relating to their innate instinct to strive for a meaning in an existence that's worth living for, they will compensate for this disappointment vicariously by entering a state of sexual narcosis, and this occurs in all cases in which a person's will to meaning founders. The more his need for meaning in life remains unfulfilled, the more he throws himself into the arms of the will to pleasure (not only sexuality but also criminality can serve as the vicarious compensation for an existential frustration, as evidenced by Hedwig R. Farmer,* who, reporting from New York on the increase in crimes committed by young people, stated that people there feel that they are living in an interwar period [provisional attitude to life!]). The fact that these examples of criminality are so avidly imitated points to a lack of collective ideals within this "vacuum of meaning" (existential frustration!). Only then do we get to something like what psychoanalysis calls the pleasure principle, only then does the satisfaction of base instincts become a means to an end—in fact, it becomes the actual aim (or end) of enjoyment, and thus the means of enjoyment. But more than this, in this situation, enjoyment itself has long since become only a means to an end, and that end is anesthesia.*

The person who is oriented towards meaning and aspires to strong values then becomes dominated by base instincts and driven by desire. Both the opposite and the counterpart of his pleasure-seeking behavior is the self-pity that underlies drug and medication abuse.

The nothingness that a person fears is not only outside him but also deep within himself. He is gripped by fear of this inner nothingness and is running away from himself out of fear of himself. He is fleeing from solitude, because being alone means being alone with himself. And when is he usually forced to spend time alone with himself? Whenever business and busyness slow down or even stop—at the weekend, on Sunday. “Einsamer Sonntag” (“Gloomy Sunday”) is the title of a notorious, soulful hit—notorious because of the many suicides that it led to, and that were certainly not attributed to it solely by an enterprising music publisher. That’s because we neurologists know very well the syndrome that we call *Sunday neurosis.* This consists of a feeling of desolation and emptiness, of the vacuousness and pointlessness of life, that breaks out and appears within us precisely when the hustle and bustle of our weekday work comes to a standstill. (Compare the conclusion of a social institute in Hamburg that 58 percent of the young people they had surveyed literally “did not know what to do with themselves” in their free time. This figure does not even include sports fanatics, who must surely account for another 30 percent. The rest also preferred to attend collective events. Another survey apparently found that 43.6 percent of all cinema goers in the world only go to the cinema because they “don’t know what to do with their time.”)

H. Plügge was able to show that existential frustration in general, but so-called Sunday neurosis in particular, can end in voluntary death, i.e., suicide. In a study of 50 suicide attempts, he proved that they were ultimately neither the result of illness, nor financial hardship, neither of troubles at work nor other conflicts. Instead, surprisingly, they could be traced back to one thing: excessive boredom—in other words, unfulfilled human longing, human struggle for a valid purpose in life. Such boredom can be deadly.

And so Karl Bednarik may also be right when he writes: “The problem of the material hardship of the masses has turned into the problem of affluence, the problem of leisure.” Considering this issue in relation to the neurosis problem, however, Paul Polak* pointed out years ago that we should not be under the illusion that neurotic illnesses would go away by

themselves when all the social questions have been resolved. The opposite would be true: only once the social questions have been resolved would the existential ones emerge into people's consciousness: "The solution to the social question would truly liberate the spiritual problem, would mobilise it. A person would only then become free to really take himself in hand and would recognise the problematic aspects of himself, the problems inherent in his own existence."

As Werner Kollath was able to demonstrate, statistics show that, in the last few decades, medicine has been incredibly successful in combating infectious diseases, including tuberculosis, previously widespread and much feared, but since 1921, all these successes have been outweighed by the increase in cases of sickness and death that occur as a result of inadequate nutrition or even violence, but above all as a result of traffic accidents. However, the increase in traffic accidents is not the fault of our fast pace of life in itself, it is certainly not the fault of technology, nor the increase in road vehicles, it is the fault of the human mind that uses this technology, that misuses the technology. It is not true that it's the faster pace of life that is making people so ill, although one could get that impression when confronted with the phenomenon of *manager's disease* [burnout]. Manager's disease is not technogenic but psychogenic. As Joachim Bodamer* has shown, nowadays, for the masses in central Europe, the car is the main criterion of their standard of living, and the average person frequently works himself to the bone just for the sake of prestige, in fact, just so that he can buy himself a car. And I can imagine that a significant percentage of those people who succumb to manager's disease and eventually perish from it would not have been afflicted by this sickness in the first place if they had not had the egotistical ambition—driven by the motive of increasing their social standing—to pull out all the stops to buy a swanky car, even at the expense of their health. In a word, these people are potentially dying because of their cars before they even own them. People with such pride and ambition can sometimes also reach for even loftier goals. We know a foreign patient who represents the most typical case of manager's disease that we have ever encountered. Once this man had been examined, it was evident that he was working himself to death. However, the internal medical examination had only been able to highlight the danger—but not the actual cause of illness in this case. This could only be deduced when the patient was examined by a psychiatrist, because at that point it

became apparent why he had plunged himself into his work so intensely and had overworked. He was wealthy enough—he even owned a private plane—but that was just it: he admitted that he was now going all out to be able to afford a jet instead of this ordinary plane. In a certain sense, the feeling of being unfulfilled regarding an existential purpose that could make one's life worth living—the unfulfilled feeling that we have termed existential frustration—could also be called *Mrs. manager's disease.* For, just as the so-called managers don't have enough time to rest and recover, their wives have far too much time on their hands and don't know what to do with it—and most of all, they don't know what to do with themselves.

We* have defined neurosis (sensu stricto) as a psychogenic illness. As well as neurosis in the strict sense of the word, we know of other neuroses in the broader sense, for example, somatogenic, noogenic and sociogenic (pseudo-) neuroses. With all of these, we are dealing with neuroses in the clinical sense. But there are also neuroses in a metaclinical sense, as well as neuroses in a paraclinical sense. Collective neuroses belong to the last group. They are quasi-neuroses, neuroses in the figurative sense. We have already seen that neuroses in the clinical sense are not on the increase. That is to say, clinical neuroses have not increased to such an extent that they have become collective neuroses. As far as we are justified in talking about collective neuroses in the paraclinical sense, in our experience the particular collective neurosis of the present time is characterized by four symptoms:

1. *Provisional attitude to life.* These days, the average person is used to living day-to-day. He learned that in the last world war, because he could only go from one day to the next, never knowing whether he would live to see the next day. But the person who lives a provisional existence doesn't notice what he is missing—that he is, in fact, missing out on everything. He forgets how right Bismarck was when he said: "Life is like being at the dentist. You always think that the worst is still to come, and yet it is already over." Well, we still haven't got rid of the provisional attitude to existence that we owe to the war. People today are still in its thrall, and a—how shall I put it—*mid-century mood* is taking over. Its most striking characteristic is a kind of *atom bomb phobia.* People nowadays apparently live with an eye constantly on the future atomic bomb. Recently, there was a public discussion program on a Vienna radio station, when an ordinary

woman stood up and made this statement, word for word: “As long as the threat of the atomic bomb hangs over us, it is irresponsible to bring children into the world.” The average person today is anxiously awaiting the atomic bomb. And so he slides into this attitude of “*Après moi*—not *le déluge,* but—*la bombe atomique.*” But just like any anticipatory anxiety, this fearful anxiety over the atomic bomb is disastrous, because, like every fear, it threatens to bring about precisely the thing that is feared.

2. The second symptom within a pathology of the zeitgeist would be the *fatalistic attitude to life.* Whereas the person who has a provisional attitude to life tells himself that it is not necessary to act and take his fate into his own hands, the person with the fatalistic attitude to life says: “This is not even possible.” Again, it was in the war, particularly in the army, where men learned (or had to learn) to let themselves be swept along, let themselves be pushed, as such people tend to put it. They don’t just let themselves be pushed, they themselves also push—they push the blame for their failure onto this or that, onto internal conditions or external circumstances. The average person today is possessed by superstitious belief in various forces of destiny, and our current nihilism just continues to feed this belief in fate. By means in the form of the major *Homunculisms,* biologism, psychologism and sociologism, man is talked into believing that, accordingly, he is a mere automaton governed by his reflexes; a mere creature of instinct; or a mere product of blood and soil, heritage and environment or the like—in any case, he is neither free nor responsible. Either he puts the blame on the social situation in which he finds himself, or on his psychological and physical traits. Especially with regard to the psychological, we should not disguise the fact that psychoanalysis often plays into the hands of this fatalistic streak that people exhibit nowadays. At the very least, the vulgar interpretation of psychoanalysis is grist to the mill of neurotic fatalism. The person with a fatalistic attitude to life talks endlessly about base instincts, the unconscious and the id. In the service of this fatalism, he abuses and misinterprets psychoanalysis: “The ego is not the master in its own house” and “Man is a being of weak intelligence, dominated by his base desires.” These quotations from Sigmund Freud only supply arguments for neurotic fatalism. This vulgar psychoanalysis of the

masses has itself been infected by nihilism. It has become the "secondary gain" of collective neurosis. In the USA, where the popularization of psychoanalysis has assumed proportions that Central Europeans can hardly imagine, the downsides are already apparent. We must bear in mind that "today, in the United States, undergoing treatment with a psychoanalyst is practically the done thing."* "The more analysis spreads and its basic principles become common knowledge," says Emil A. Gutheil,** "the more suspicious we should be of so-called "free" association." These days, we can trust only very few patients to produce truly spontaneous associations. Most of the associations that a patient produces over the course of a longer period of treatment will be anything but "free"; in many cases, they are calculated to give the analyst certain ideas, which the patient assumes the analyst will welcome. This explains the fact that one finds so much material in medical reports published by certain analysts that seems to confirm the ideas of the therapist. The patients of Adlerian therapists only seem to have problems concerning power, and their conflicts appear to be caused exclusively by their ambition, their striving for superiority, etc. The patients of devotees of Jung inundate their therapists with archetypes and all kinds of anagogic symbolism. The Freudians hear confirmation from their patients of the castration complex, the trauma of birth and similar concepts. Only very few of the patient's ideas are not thought through in advance and distorted. For example, the American psychiatrist G. R. Forrer* mentions the case of a woman who had a three-year-old son in whose presence scissors could not be used, "because little boys are frightened of being castrated." W. G. Eliasberg** asks the moral question of "whether we perhaps have too much psychology." Of course, by this he means psychologism. Aspects of this psychologism are spreading in the USA, including searching for the complexes, base instincts, emotions and interests behind everything human. H. Schulte* talks about the "resistance of today's European to the claims of a rather too all-encompassing psychoanalytical picture of the world, that is presented to him from across the ocean." However, not just Freudian psychoanalysis but also [Léopold] Szondi's fate analysis (a term used by its proponents) plays into the hands of contemporary fatalism. In effect, it asserts no more nor less than that a person's fate is written in

their genes. Szondi himself describes his doctrine as fatalism, albeit a controlled fatalism. Today, our fate is not "written in the stars" as it was in the past, but in our genes. But our fate is still written in the stars—if not written, then printed: we can all witness this as soon as we open a daily newspaper . . . after all, a survey by the Gallup institute revealed that only 45 percent of Austrian women did not "believe in an astrological connection between their own lives and the position of the stars."

3. *Collectivist thinking.* If a person neglects to grasp a given situation in the sense of the two abovementioned attitudes to existence, the provisional and the fatalistic, then it becomes evident in the other two symptoms of the pathology of the zeitgeist that he is barely able to comprehend the person, i.e., himself and the other as a person. He really doesn't want to stand out, he wants to submerge himself in the mass of humanity, he would like to dissolve into it. In reality, he drowns in it, he gives himself up, no longer a free and responsible being. It is obvious that we are not speaking of community here, but only of the "anonymous mass," the crowd. The community certainly needs individual personalities—and, indeed, the other way around: every individual personality needs the community in order to find fulfilment within its structure; in other words, to be allowed to become a whole person. However, it's all very different when it comes to the "mass of humanity": within the mass, no individual personality can ever really come into its own or flourish. But the "mass of humanity" would also rather not have to deal with personality, because actually, personality is something that only disturbs the mass. That is why the mass fights individual personalities, oppresses them, robs the personalities of their freedom, and curtails this freedom in favor of uniformity. But what becomes of the third aspect that we tend to think about in this context? What becomes of brotherhood? Well, it degenerates, it deteriorates into mere herd instinct.
4. *Fanaticism.* Just as the collectivist ignores his own personality, the fanatic ignores the personality of the other person, the "other" who thinks differently. He doesn't allow him to matter, because, for the fanatic, only his own opinion matters, but in reality he has no opinion of his own, only so-called public opinion, and he doesn't really have it—it has him. Fanaticism tends to politicize fanatical people, whereas

> exactly the opposite would be needed—not to politicize human beings but to humanize politics. On the other hand, the fanatic acts as though politics, if I may say so, is the solution to all problems; but politics cannot be the remedy for everything because it is often itself a symptom of illness. Public opinion, which we talked about earlier, takes shape in the form of clichéd catchphrases and slogans. Once thrown into the "mass of humanity," these catchphrases and slogans trigger a psychological chain reaction that is far more dangerous than the physical chain reaction that forms the mechanism of the atomic bomb, because this mechanism would never be able to function if the psychological chain reaction did not precede it. And so we can understand how right Karl Kraus was with his words: "If humanity had no clichés it would not need any weapons." As far as the atom bomb itself is concerned, Einstein hit the nail on the head: "The problem is not the atomic bomb, the problem is the human heart." Insofar as we can identify the aforementioned pathology of the zeitgeist as a psychological epidemic, we should not forget one thing: somatic epidemics are typical results of war, but at the same time, psychological epidemics are possible *causes* of war.

Let us now ask ourselves how widespread these collective neurotic symptoms have become. To find the answer, I asked my colleagues to conduct a survey of people who were not neurotic (in the strict clinical sense), and in which they were presented with test questions. This was the test question for Symptom 1, concerning a provisional attitude to life: "Are you of the opinion that there is no benefit in making decisions and taking your fate into your own hands, because, after all, the atomic bomb is going to explode and so everything is pointless?" The test question for Symptom 2, regarding the fatalistic attitude to life, was: "Do you believe that human beings are ultimately nothing more than the playthings of external and internal forces and powers?" The test question for collectivist thinking was: "Do you believe that the most important thing is not to stand out?" And finally, this, I must admit, rather loaded question for fanaticism: "Is it your view that someone who wants the best is justified in using any means he thinks suitable to achieve it?" Certainly, in our view, nothing is so indicative of a fanatic as the fact that for him everything is just a means to an end. His view is that the end justifies the means. In reality, it is true that, conversely,

there are means that would be capable of defiling the most sacred of ends. From the results of this test, my colleagues were able to conclude that out of all the test subjects, only one person was really free of all four symptoms of collective neurosis, while half the people we tested exhibited at least three of the four symptoms. This result from our sample showed that *people who are not clinically neurotic can be collectively neurotic.* We can see the countercheck for our example in the results of psychiatric examinations that were performed on the accused in the war crimes trials, and which concluded that these people were clinically healthy.

Now, we know that not only a mental but also a moral and spiritual conflict, for example, a crisis of conscience, can lead to neurosis. We define this as a *noogenic neurosis.* It is conceivable that for as long as a person is capable of having any conflict of conscience at all, he will be immune to fanaticism or even to collective neurosis. Conversely, for someone who suffers from a collective neurosis—for example, a political fanatic—if he becomes capable of hearing the voice of his conscience again to any degree, even to the extent that he suffers as a result of it, he will become capable of overcoming his collective neurosis to the same degree.

A few years ago, I spoke on this topic at a medical conference, and in the audience were a number of professional colleagues who live under a totalitarian regime. After my lecture, they came over to me and said, “We know exactly what you’re talking about, Dr. Frankl; where we come from, it’s called ‘officials’ disease.’” Over time, a number of party officials suffer nervous breakdowns due to the growing burden on their conscience; however, they are then cured of their political fanaticism. So, while the coexistence of collective neurosis and clinical health is possible, the relationship between collective neurosis and noogenic neurosis is inversely proportional.

I recently had the opportunity to speak about all this while overseas, and people kept asking me, “Do you think that what you’re saying is maybe only true of Europe?” When I was asked this question for the first time, I improvised the following answer: It’s possible that the problem of collective neurosis is more topical in Europe and that Europeans are under a more acute threat from collective neurosis, but the real danger—the danger of nihilism—is global and is not in any way confined to a single continent. All four symptoms of collective neurosis—the provisional attitude to existence and the fatalistic attitude to life, the collectivist thinking and the

fanaticism—can be traced back to a reluctance to take responsibility and flight from freedom. However, freedom and responsibility make up the spirituality of the human being. But the average person today is spiritually weary, and this spiritual weariness forms the essence of contemporary nihilism. Europe may be a kind of seismograph regarding this nihilistic danger. Upon it, a little earlier than elsewhere, we can read the threat of a spiritual earthquake, spiritual shocks and upheavals; it's possible that the European has a sixth sense for the spiritual miasma of nihilism. But it is precisely because of this that he may be able to produce the antidote sooner and more successfully than the non-European.

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* V. E. Frankl, "Collective Neuroses," *Wiener Medizinische Wochenschrift* 38/39 (1955): 772–76. Courtesy of the Viktor Frankl Archive.

* Blüher (1888–1955) was a writer and philosopher.

** V. E. Frankl, *Homo patiens* (Vienna: Deuticke, 1950), 45.

*** J. Hirschmann, "Umweltstabilität der Neurosehäufigkeit," *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten* 189 (1952): 192.

* H. Kranz, "Fortschritte der Neurologie," *Psychiatrie* 23 (1955): 58.

** A.V. Orelli, "Der Wandel des Inhaltes der depressiven Ideen bei der reinen Melancholie," *Schweizer Archiv für Neurologie und Psychiatrie* [Swiss Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry] 73 (1954).

* Hirschmann, "Umweltstabilität der Neurosehäufigkeit," 189.

* H. Schulte, *Gesundheit und Wohlfahrt* [*Health and Welfare*] (1952): 78.

** E. Menninger-Lerchenthal, *Das europäische Selbstmordproblem* [The European Suicide Problem] (Vienna: Deuticke, 1947), 37.

* H. R. Farmer, *Wort und Wahrheit* [The Word and the Truth] 9 (1954): 929.

* Cf. Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, Book VIII, Chapter 1: "Pierre no longer suffered moments of despair, hypochondria, and disgust with life, but the malady that had formerly found expression in such acute attacks was driven inwards and never left him for a moment. 'What for? Why? What is going on in the world?' he would ask himself in perplexity several times a day, involuntarily beginning to reflect anew on the meaning of the phenomenon of life [the will to meaning]; but knowing by experience that there were no answers to these questions [existential frustration], he made haste to turn away from them . . . It was too dreadful to be under the burden of these insoluble problems, so he abandoned himself to any distraction in order to forget them . . . To Pierre all men seemed like those soldiers, seeking refuge from life: some in ambition [striving for validity], some in cards, some in framing laws, some in women [pleasure principle!], some in toys, some in horses . . . some in sport, some in wine, and some in governmental affairs."

* P. Polak, *Psychotherapie und Wissenschaft* [Psychotherapy and Science] (Vienna: Verein für Individualpsychologie [Association for Individual Psychology], 1947).

* J. Bodamer, *Zeitwende* 24 (1952): 21.

* Polak, *Psychotherapie und Wissenschaft.*

* *Aufbau,* New York (December 25, 1953): 19.

** E. A. Gutheil, “Aktive Psychoanalyse,” [“Active Psychoanalysis”] in *Handbuch der Neurosenlehre und Psychotherapie* [*Handbook of the Study of Neurosis and Psychotherapy*] (Munich: published by V. E. Frankl, V. E. v. Gebsattel and J. H. Schultz, 1959), 159–70.

* G. R. Forrer, *The Psychiatric Quarterly* 28 (1954): 126.

** W. G. Eliasberg, *Schweizer Archiv für Neurologie und Psychiatrie* [Swiss Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry] 62 (1948): 113.

* H. Schulte, *Gesundheit und Wohlfahrt* [*Health and Wellbeing*] 73 (1952).

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Freedom and Responsibility

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"Existential Analysis and the Problems of Our Times" unfolds the connection between the search for meaning and human freedom and responsibility. Frankl gave this lecture on December 28, 1946, at the Franco-Austrian university meeting in St. Christoph am Arlberg, Austria.* Influenced by his experiences during the Second World War and his time in several concentration camps, it is remarkable how Frankl emphasizes the unconditional nature of human freedom.

EXISTENTIAL ANALYSIS AND THE PROBLEMS OF OUR TIMES

The beginning of our modern era brought with it the birth of the natural sciences and their application: technology. In the nineteenth century, they matured. We now have to accept the legacy of that century. The mature natural sciences led to naturalism, and technology led to a utilitarian attitude. Both were passed down, instilled and cultivated in flesh and blood so that they became completely natural to human beings—but, at the same time, they made our understanding of ourselves and the world significantly more difficult. If a human being understands himself as only a creature of nature in accordance with a naturalistic attitude, and understands the world only as a mere means to an end in accordance with the technological-utilitarian attitude, this is how he subjugates the world to himself through technology. However, at the same time, while he *sub-jects* [i.e., throws under] the world to himself, he himself becomes an *ob-ject* [i.e., is thrown up against the world]. So we arrive at the paradox that when a human being is "naturalized," he becomes denatured, i.e., when seeing himself as a pure creature of nature, he does not see his own true nature, his true being. Meanwhile, on the other hand, by degrading the world into a mere technical means to an end, the human being actually overlooks the possible and necessary final end or purpose. It is no wonder that now, in our century, we have come to a major turning point, to a consciousness of the immediate! And this inevitably in the double sense: a self-awareness of one's own being (the reaction to the loss of awareness about one's nature) as well as a

recollection of the actual meaning (the reaction to the loss of awareness about the ultimate purpose of all technology). What are these but existential questions? Because what is now in question is existence and meaning.

It was Kierkegaard who first raised the existential question in its modern form, in other words the "problem of modern man." What he postulated in the nineteenth century was made possible and realized in the twentieth. Bergson's philosophy of life and the phenomenology of Husserl (and his student [Max] Scheler) did the preparatory work and therefore made contemporary existential philosophy possible.

After the First World War, Heidegger and Jaspers actualized it. It was the Second World War's role to promote its spread, to update its reasoning and, furthermore, to hugely radicalize it. But if we ask ourselves why, we have to remind ourselves that, from the outset, the Second World War meant more than just the experience of the soldiers on the frontline. To the "hinterland" (which no longer really existed), it brought the experience of the bomb shelter and the experience of the concentration camp. We had long ago left behind the Kantian claim that every thing has its value but man alone has his dignity. Because it was in the nature of the capitalist system to degrade the human being, the worker, to such an extent that he became little more than a machine component in the production process. But this was far from being the triumph of the technological utilitarianism that we spoke of earlier because, for a time, it was only that a person's work had become a mere means. However, the war turned his whole life into such a means. The war degraded the human being even further—it turned him into cannon fodder. The peak of this advancing process of degradation was finally reached in the concentration camp. For here, it was no longer merely labor or even life itself that had become a means, it was also death. For in the concentration camps, the human being was a guinea pig. Thus, in this process of degradation, an element of progress became apparent—namely, technological progress. And, in fact, is there any other kind of progress? And is not all progress only technological progress, which only impresses us as progress *per se* because we live in a technological age?

So, what does this existential questioning mean? With this existential question, the questioner is putting himself in question—existential questioning means questioning the nature of being human. To what extent can we now state that such questioning has advanced in recent times? Well, during these times, absolutely everything had become questionable: money,

power, fame, happiness—all of this had been molten away from the human being. But simultaneously, the person himself had melted down, burned up by pain and seared through with suffering; melted right down to his very *being.* What had melted away was the *having.* One *has* money, one *has* power, one *has* fame, one *has* happiness; but one *is* a human being. Therefore, what remained was the human being himself—the essence of his humanity. So, these times led to the stark exposure of what it is to be human. In the tumult of the encirclement battles, in the air-raid shelters and in the concentration camps, man discovered the truth: the most crucial element in anything and everything is the human being. But what is a human being? He is the being who constantly makes decisions. And he is continually deciding what he is, what he will be in the next moment. Within him, he has the possibility to be both angel and devil. For the human being as we have got to know him—and we have got to know him perhaps better than any previous generation—the human being is the creature that invented the gas chambers, but he is also the person who went into those gas chambers with his head held high, singing “The Marseillaise” or with a prayer on his lips.

And yet, if we assume that man is a being who makes decisions for himself, then the human being begins precisely where naturalism says he should end. If we take biologism as one of the forms of naturalism, then from the biologist, we hear that a person is either a “typical” pyknic type or a “typical” asthenic type, or a “typical” athletic type. In any case, he must be the way he is; he cannot be any different. Or let’s take sociologism. According to this theory, a human being is a typical capitalist, or a typical proletarian or a typical petit bourgeois; and, in any case, he must have a particular mentality in accordance with his sociological classification—this has been explicitly allocated to him. And it seems unthinkable that he could escape this definite classification as the “type” to which he belongs. Or let’s take that amalgam of biologism and sociologism, that “collective” biologism, so to speak, that reveals itself in racism. According to that theory, I am either a “Nordic achievement type” or a “Mediterranean representational type” or a “desert revelation type.” In any case, I am held captive by and chained to this type, and all my decisions, including those concerning my view of the world, are fatalistically determined in accordance with this type.

But it's not true that a person who is a "typical . . ." can only behave in that particular way and can't be any different. In a concentration camp, I got to know the camp commandant, an SS man, and he was by no means a "typical SS man" but, in fact, secretly bought medicines for the concentration camp prisoners, using his own money. And on the other hand, in the same camp, I got to know the camp elder, who was himself a prisoner, and beat up his fellow prisoners. And finally I got to know a senior Gestapo official who, every evening in a state of shock and sadness, would tell his family of the deportations while his wife broke down in tears. He begged some of the Jews that he dealt with to rant and curse him as much as they could, because as soon as his superiors no longer heard them cursing him, they would get suspicious and remove him from his post, and with it the possibility that he could now and again help relieve their suffering. All these people had the opportunity to be "typical" representatives of their "race" or their social function, and yet they did not do so, and instead decided to be "atypical." So we can say: there aren't any types that categorically determine a person's behavior. Thus, in this sense there are also no races, or else just two "races"—the race of decent people and the race of indecent people. This division cuts right across all the types—the biological, psychological and sociological. And we would hope that humanity would come to the realization that all decent people share a common bond, transcending all races and types, and that, just as Judaism once gave monotheism to the world, the doctrine of the one God, someday *monanthropism* will be given to the world, the doctrine of the *one* human race.

But we know now, more than ever, that decent people are in the minority. Perhaps in an eternal minority, a forever faltering minority. However, this pessimism need not make us fatalistic at all. In the past, activism was connected with optimism, with a belief in progress. However, in our modern age, it's precisely the belief in a self-propelling, ever-advancing progress, in an automatically increasing level of human development, which paralyzes our activity and allays our conscience. We are now a long way away from such a belief in progress. We have become pessimists because we know what man is capable of. But when we said earlier that it all comes down to the individual, then we must add: it comes down to *every single* individual. And particularly because when it comes to decent human beings we are talking about a minority, every single human

being matters. And it will come down to his personal determination to fight —his personal willingness to make sacrifices—if he is not to be complicit in repeating the sacrifice of entire masses of people. So he will not shy away from sacrificing his own life. Because what would this life be if it held a value in itself and its whole value did not consist precisely in the fact that it can be relinquished in exchange for something else? It was precisely in the concentration camp that this essential transcendence of life, this intentional act of going beyond oneself, arose. And even if the question for most of the camp inmates was, “Will I survive? Because if I don’t, then all this suffering would have no meaning,” there were others for whom the question was different: “Does this suffering, even this dying, have a meaning? Because if not, then survival would also have no meaning.” A life that depends on the mercy of a chance occurrence, namely the chance of whether or not you will “get out of there alive,” such a life cannot be meaningful and worth living, even if you do “get away with your life.” Thus, behind all the meaninglessness of the suffering and sacrifice in the concentration camps there was such a palpable and unconditional “meaningfulness” that it also encompassed the meaning of suffering, sacrifice and death.

We spoke about the individual, on whom everything depends. As such he evades any attempt to fit him into an organization. And yet narrow bridges lead from one person to another, and these bridges carry the spirit of our times, and on these bridges, this spirit moves—and it’s the spirit of the future. It was bridges such as these that brought us together here from many different countries. In this way, decent people from all over the world find themselves together, transcending all borders. And I would like to add one more wish that, insofar as it is true that people are politicized these days, they should not just be politicized in terms of party politics, but they should be “cosmo-politicized.” And this is becoming more important, as everywhere we can observe that decency and humanity are withdrawing from public and political life into private life. Decent people are becoming disgusted with politics and are displaying a shameful tendency to hide their decency by only moving in their own narrow sphere. In a time where the word “idealist” has almost become a dirty word, people are tending to retreat within their own four walls—along with their goodness. And so we won’t be surprised when we encounter the “type” of the young illegal trader who, with a lack of social responsibility, hawks his black-market goods in

order to enable a better life for his family (and certainly not just for himself). The main reason for this general aversion to politics is that party politics today is completely governed by utilitarianism in the way that it sticks to the party program and to its battle tactics. Its position is that the end justifies the means, a point of view that manifests itself in the opportunism of the party leaders as well as the "conjuncturism" of the party members. Above all, the aversion of many decent people to the machinations of party politics is grounded in total propaganda fatigue. All propaganda has been discredited by the events of recent years. Consequently, what remains can only be one thing: the propaganda of the role model! That lies in the hands of the educators. And something else: the propaganda of the conversation—a conversation between two people *in camera caritatis*—whether it's a conversation between a priest and a believer—or in view of the "migration of the Western population from the pastor to the psychotherapist" (Viktor Emil von Gebsattel)—a conversation between the neurologist and his patient.

At the beginning of this lecture, we talked about the existential self-reflection of the human regarding his actual being, in terms of being free from his apparent total dependence on the biological, sociological and physiological laws of the "type" that he belongs to, as stipulated by naturalism. If we talk a little more about this essential human freedom, then we will want to confront it with its dialectical opposite—fate. To define something as fateful, only things that oppose my freedom come into question, in the sense of the fate within me as well as the fate around me. The latter is primarily the material factor, "material" in the wider sense of the word, meaning also "economic." Consequently, we are talking about man's economic situation. Finally, we need to consider his external fate in the sense of his social situation, since it is understood by sociologism as the only determinant of human existence. Therefore, we are faced with the problem of historical materialism, which claims that the material (economic) conditions or the social situation clearly and unambiguously determine the social "being" and the consciousness of the human being.

Is it true, we ask ourselves, that the (social) environment has such character-forming power that the individual is completely dependent on it and is not only psychologically influenced, but in fact dominated by it? For example, let us look at the changes in character that the psychologist and characterologist Emil Utitz believed he observed in long-term concentration

camp prisoners. These character changes, as he interpreted them, were a displacement of the character structure towards schizoidia ([Ernst] Kretschmer). The prisoners became increasingly irritable as well as apathetic. What we need to remember, however, is that—verifiably—every single one of those prisoners still had the inner freedom to resist these (only seemingly necessary, and externally induced) deformations of character. Time and again it was evident that there were also concentration camp prisoners who could suppress their irritation and overcome their apathy. Every human being has this inner freedom until their very last breath, even when faced with apparently overwhelming influences from their surroundings. And even though everything was taken away from this concentration camp prisoner, he kept his inner freedom. Whatever fate befell him, he held onto the freedom to react to his fate in this way or that way; and there was indeed a "this way or that way," even in the concentration camp. If others, who were themselves concentration camp prisoners, have interpreted the psychological reactions to being imprisoned differently, in fact in accordance with Freudian psychoanalysis, and claimed that imprisonment and life in the camp caused a "regression," a regression to more primitive forms of instinctive behavior, I myself can only refer to the fact that there were always individual cases that proved that a person is capable of escaping these apparently inevitable character changes. There were enough examples showing that, for some, the identical experience of the situation in the concentration camp led to nothing like a regression; on the contrary, it led to a progression, to an inner "striding forward and stepping up," perhaps in the sense of Hölderlin's observation that went like this: "When I stand upon my misfortune, I rise higher."

However, we don't want to do Marxism an injustice by claiming that it asserts that external, economic and societal conditions solely and unambiguously determine the consciousness of man. Whoever claims this is not a true Marxist, but only a Marxist in a vulgar sense. For even doctrinaire Marxism admits that the relationship of dependence between social existence and consciousness is not just one-sided, but that consciousness also affects social existence. That a person's class clearly determines their class consciousness is only half the Marxist truth. We are still keeping to Marxist thought when we add that the opposite is also true: class consciousness influences a person's social situation—or rather, their political development. If a Marxist were to maintain that the fate and

fortune of every human being is indeed categorically dependent on the socioeconomic structure, then we would only have to ask this Marxist how he can justify talking about “education in class consciousness,” because education always assumes the pupil’s freedom, the freedom to adapt and take one’s (social as well as historical) fate into one’s own hands.* So we can see that freedom is also a precondition, both in socialism and Marxism, as a means in the political struggle. Let us then ask ourselves whether or not it is also *implicitly* assumed in the ultimate political goal of socialism. And we find that freedom really is included in the ideal form of a community, the creation of which is the very purpose of socialist politics.

However, such a definition of community is far removed from the concept that we could almost call “political zoology.” If you take this term literally, you will immediately understand what it means: a picture of a human being as a pure *zoon politikon*!** It’s the idea of a human being as one whose society would be that of a creature, zoonic. But this is not the case; rather, every true human community contains a free and intentional commitment to it—the individual is not simply a slave to, and rooted in, the community, like an animal, but the individual always decides in favor of the community. In such a decision lies the impetus for freedom, and so we can see that there is a fundamental relationship between human freedom and human community.

Furthermore, this version of the idea of human community as one that is founded on freedom differs from the idea of “community” in totalitarianism, which doesn’t actually mean true community, but rather a mere collective. The old question of whether the individual or the community is more important is a rather juvenile one—and perhaps people only continue to ask it because apparently humanity is also still in a state of puberty. However, we stand by the view that, besides the fundamental relationship between freedom and community, there exists a genuine dialectical relationship between the individual and the community. And we can formulate it thus: only the community can ensure the meaning of individuality for the individuals, but also, only the safeguarding of individuality for the individuals can ensure the meaning of community. This, and this alone, is what distinguishes the community from a mere collective, or even from “the masses.” For in the collective, the human being is not only unindividual but, in fact, inhuman; in the collective, the human being gets lost, since for the collective, he only has “meaning” as

just one of many productive elements. We have seen where this ends, in the euthanasia perpetrated by the National Socialist state, which, from the outset, viewed life that was no longer productive as “unworthy of life” and, as such, had to be destroyed. Meanwhile, every value that was truly human, everything that made the person valuable, even beyond his productivity, and that made his existence decent and dignified, was no longer recognized.

Therefore, in this section we have ascertained that human freedom is also required for a proper understanding of Marxism, both in the sense of a means as well as in the sense of an ultimate goal. Or, in other words, that socialism can never do without freedom—neither as *socialismus militans* nor as *socialismus triumphans.* And therewith, in the course of our examination of the problem of historical materialism, we have effected its change to personal socialism by revealing the impetus for freedom.

Now we come to the next point, where we have to confront human freedom not with the fateful situation around us, but in fact with the (apparently) fateful situation within ourselves. However, our inner fate is represented primarily through what we commonly refer to as a disposition. This brings us right into the middle of a critique of biologism—having critically examined sociologism earlier—for a person’s traits represent the biological dispositions within him, both in the sense of “inherited” familial dispositions and in the sense of national dispositions or characterological tendencies. In this regard, I would like to immediately stress the following: although all dispositions within a human being are fateful and, as such, lie outside his freedom and sense of responsibility from the outset, they are in themselves, in terms of their value, either neutral or else ambivalent. They are just possibilities—which are only actualized through a form of personal decision. It’s only the actualization of these inner possibilities in and through the individual that can produce a value or a non-value, a virtue or a vice, from originally value-neutral dispositions. And so we have now arrived in the middle of the problem of collective guilt. But here, we must distinguish strictly between three things. Collective guilt actually exists in three forms, but these three forms of collective guilt are hardly ever referred to in current parlance. The following three forms are the only ones in which guilt or responsibility can truly be collective:

1. *Collective liability.* Firstly, so-called collective guilt can be understood —and thereby make sense—as making members of a particular

collective in its entirety collectively liable for the consequences of misdeeds committed by the collective as such. I will now illustrate how collective liability can apply even when the individual bears no personal responsibility: if I have to undergo an appendectomy—the necessity of which I surely cannot be held responsible for—I am not "guilty" of being afflicted with appendicitis. And, nevertheless, I will owe a fee to the doctor who performed my operation and will be "liable" for the payment. And so, a nation in its entirety and also every single individual who belongs to that nation, is liable for the fact that it had to be liberated from tyranny and terror by other nations, and that those other freedom-loving nations had to sacrifice their young people on the battlefields in order to free all these blameless individuals from their government—since they were not able to do it themselves, and since they were too powerless to do it, as they themselves continue to assert. Thus, I am jointly liable for the consequences of these crimes, even if I am personally innocent of the crimes that my country committed on the world stage.

2. *Guilt in joining a collective.* If I have joined a collective, let's say a political party, then I may be personally guilty to a certain extent; I may have made myself complicit in any crimes that were committed under the party's policies. But firstly: one doesn't join a nation, so I cannot in any way be held responsible for coincidentally belonging to a nation that, for example, once declared an illegal war. Secondly: even if I have joined a political party and, in so doing, have become complicit in the crimes the party has committed, even then, it is a question of whether and to what extent I was verifiably put under pressure and whether this act of joining the party, for which I am now held responsible, was more or less enforced, against my will, and was something that was neither done entirely of my own free will, nor entirely within my responsibility. Now, it may not be easy to decide upon this admittedly sensitive question in individual cases. However, a person can only claim the right to condemn others and to admonish someone with the fact that they should have been able to withstand pressure and coercion—only he has the right to admonish others who can prove that he himself withstood them. Only he who would rather have gone to the concentration camp himself than give in to the pressure—only he should be allowed to condemn the person who

capitulated. It's all too easy for those who were not in the same situation as the accused—for example, those who were sitting in safety abroad—to demand heroism or even martyrdom from others, or to accuse others of weakness and cowardice.

3. *Collective responsibility.* Finally (and this can cause misunderstandings), collective guilt can also be understood as the form of collective responsibility according to which every individual is somehow jointly responsible for every other individual—"one for all," as the saying goes. But then we also have to complete the motto: "and all for one!" If each person really is jointly responsible for every other person, then I would rather we said, "Everyone for everyone." And here, any instance of Pharisaism would be extremely inappropriate, whereby one nation might be weighed against another. Let's admit, every human being, every single one, as well as every single nation, is constantly "accompanied by" evil. And, to use a musical expression, this accompaniment is truly "obbligato." Evil is everywhere! And just as in the last few years we have seen all that man is capable of, we have also learned that every single human being is capable of it. Of course, evil will not become a reality in every individual; but evil is present in everyone, at least as a possibility. And evil was not just a possibility in everyone in the past, but it is and remains a possibility in everyone. Just let us not believe this: that the devil took up residence in a nation or that he monopolized a particular party. Those that think National Socialism created evil in the first place are also mistaken. That would be overestimating the powers of National Socialism because it was not creative or inventive, not even when it comes to evil. National Socialism did not create evil, it just encouraged it—perhaps like no other system before it. It encouraged evil through a negative selection process that it operated, and through the power of an evil example to beget evil.

But shall we now turn the tables? Should we do the same thing under another name, should we do the same thing over and over again and just change the nuance? I know a boy who was once asked whether he would like to help himself to an alcoholic drink, and in his linguistic clumsiness he replied, "No, thank you, I'm an anti-Semite when it comes to alcohol." This is what many of today's "isms" look like. Although people may not be anti-

Semites in the actual, original sense (in other words, people may not be anti-Semitic when it comes to “Semites”) they are “anti-Semites” regarding something else instead. Using the same means that exist within the system people claim to fight, they want to defeat the system itself. However, there arises an inherent contradiction, not dissimilar to the one contained in, say, an “association of anti-associationists.” And as we said before, only the nuance would be different, so we would be correct in saying the prefix has stayed the same, i.e., the “anti”! And so another slogan would be born. But we should have had enough of impactful slogans by now. For we have not only seen what we have always seen: one person collapsing from the impact of a blow. We have seen much more than that. We have seen an entire nation collapsing in on itself, impacted by a slogan.

What we need now is to break the chain of evil—not to repeat the same mistakes and repay evil with evil, but to use this unique opportunity that we now have to overcome evil precisely by not perpetuating it, by not insisting on “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” For if anyone tries to use that proverb to bring the Old Testament into the debate, we would be justified in responding with a different citation from the same book that supports our position—the story of Cain. If you ask people what the purpose of the mark of Cain was, most will say that God wanted to stigmatize Cain in order to make others aware of this first murderer. But far from it. If we check the passage we discover that after God imposed the penance on him, Cain objected that he would now be driven out, exiled and slain; and to prevent this, he was given the mark of Cain, precisely so that people would not do him any further harm, would not go on committing murder—in other words, would not answer murder with murder. And truly, as is expressly written, the murder of Cain should be more harshly punished than even Cain’s murder of Abel. This is how it was meant, and only in this way was it possible not to perpetuate fratricide.

Let us return to our original question as to whether such a thing as collective responsibility exists—responsibility in the sense that we are no longer allowed to talk of “guilt”—and after everything that has been said, we could articulate it like this: insofar as collective responsibility exists, it can only be a global collective responsibility. The right hand should not imagine that not it, but the left hand has been afflicted with boils; for it is always the whole organism that is sick. And so, one nation should not rejoice over the fact that it was the Germans and not itself that degenerated

into National Socialism, for it was the whole human race that had fallen sick.

Thus, we can see how a critical evaluation of the issues concerning collective guilt leads to the idea of global responsibility.

But it's not solely the "biological" in me—the predispositions which determine my inner fate—that my freedom has to confront. It's also the psychological that forms part of fate, along with the sociological and the biological. The psychological fate in me is the "id" (Freud). For it's the id that is intrinsically opposed to the ego and its freedom. The id drives—and whom does it drive? We are thus asking about the object in the grammatical sense. And psychoanalysis gives the answer: the id drives the ego. The ego therefore also becomes an object in the psychological sense! And it becomes an object to such an extent that from the psychoanalytic perspective, in the end, its character as a subject seems to have been fully conjured away. Ultimately, the ego itself is interpreted as being made up of instinctual drives (ego-drives). We counter that psychoanalytical concept of human existence as essentially dominated by instinctual drives with the concept of Jaspers, when he spoke of human existence being a "decisive existence"—an existence that doesn't simply exist *per se* but rather constantly decides what it is. We speak of being human as being responsible because human beings are intrinsically free.

So, the relationship between freedom and responsibility manifests itself in the fact that freedom is not simply "freedom from" but also simultaneously "freedom to," and it's taking responsibility that is precisely what the human being is free to do. Thus, we have to oppose Freud's psychoanalysis with an analysis of being human in terms of being responsible. Nevertheless, this mode of being for man, which has its ultimate discernible foundation in the phenomenon of responsibility, is called existence. The result is that out of psychoanalysis comes existential analysis, which is the evaluation of human existence beyond being merely driven by our base instincts. One could argue that existence cannot be analyzed but, in fact, can only be "illuminated." But we no longer understand analysis in the sense of Freud's atomistic notion. Instead, we use the word "analysis" in the sense of emphasizing what is already implicit in the nature of existence.

However, the freedom that forms the basis of the intrinsic responsibility of human beings, and which is repeatedly seen and described by existential

analysis—even in cases of neurotic states of being—this freedom is integral in nature: even where I am “driven by my instincts,” even there, freedom is still present—because I allow myself to be driven! The relinquishment of freedom and of its use is in itself a voluntary relinquishment. The abdication of the ego in favor of the id happens voluntarily. From this, we can conclude that freedom is capable of opposing the apparently unassailable “demonic powers” of the unconscious base instincts; indeed, that all instinctive behavior is from the outset already a structured behavior, shaped by the ego. If someone asks how it is possible for the ego to assert itself against the “demons,” then he fails to recognize the nature of the freedom of the ego as an existential freedom. But psychologism is characterized by the fact that it projects the spiritual phenomena down from their spiritual realm to the level of the merely psychological. However, having been projected in this way, they become ambiguous, and without reference to their spiritual content and with reference only to the psychological act, we can no longer ascertain whether they equate to a cultural achievement or simply a psychological symptom. Just as the shape of a circle on a flat plane is ambiguous—as it can also signify the projection from space of a two-dimensional circle, as well as a three-dimensional cylinder, a sphere or a cone—on the psychological level, there is no way of telling the difference between a Dostoevsky and any other epileptic. Consequently, this psychological projection robs our view of a whole dimension: the spiritual. But even the objectification of human existence means that we lose the dimension in which it exists. For in the moment in which we make the ego into an object, we lose its true character. This is also the inherent contradiction of behaviorism: it makes the intrinsic behavior of an individual congeal into a set of circumstances.

We must never forget that all objectification of human existence only affects the individual in “being as he is” [*So-sein* in German], but not in his true existence—“conscious being” [*Dasein* in German]. However, “conscious being” does not coincide with “being as he is”—it is not a matter of “being as we are,” but always “being able to be different.” Human existence already goes beyond its own state of “being as it is”; human existence never fully merges with its own factuality. Being human does not mean just being factual but being “facultative,” i.e., having options. Psychoanalysis, however, from its psychologistic and objectifying perspective, loses sight of human existence, because psychoanalysis targets

only the psychological in its actuality and averts its gaze from the existential with its possibilities. In contrast, during our brief investigation, we have tried to indicate the necessary path which, in our picture of the human being, will allow us to see his existence as the truly human way of being—in other words, the path from psychoanalysis to existential analysis.*

Ex definitione, existential analysis focuses on an awareness of having responsibility. The human being has responsibility in light of the finite nature of his own life, though the ultimate finiteness of the human being is obvious in the temporality of his existence. It confronts us primarily as mortality. From this, however, we know that it is precisely mortality that accounts for the responsibility of the human being. For a person who is immortal could justifiably let all opportunities for actualizing value pass him by, because it would never be important for him to do a particular thing right now—he could just as well do it later. Only in the face of the temporal finality of our existence is it possible to invoke human responsibility in its full force with a kind of categorical imperative, such as the following: “Live as if you were living for the second time and as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now!”

But it is not so much about death or even what someone has in front of him, as about what that person has put behind him. It’s a matter of responsibility in the face of transience. Indeed, even this transience cannot impair the human willingness to take responsibility. Quite the opposite. It’s the potentialities for actualizing value that are transitory; but when we actualize them, we virtually save them into reality—into the reality of the past. For, in the past, they are “captured” in the sense of the double meaning which also implies “preserved,” as expressed in the Hegelian dialectic. This “being past” or “having been” is perhaps altogether the safest form of being, because what is in the past can never be removed *from* the world. Therefore, is it not precisely our responsibility to bring it *into* the world?

We have defined responsibility as the “wherefore” of freedom. The final question now arises: the question of responsibility “before whom.” And existential analysis does not have the answer to this question. It remains an open question. Existential analysis leaves it open, just like the door to transcendence, because it can only be a matter for existential analysis as a primarily psychotherapeutic method, as it were, to furnish the room of immanence—naturally, without blocking the door to transcendence.

However, within transcendence is the absolute. And the absolute remains within transcendence. The transcendent is not in a dimension which existential analysis would dare to enter. Perhaps the absolute is not in a dimension at all, but is the coordinate system itself. In spite of this, an existential analysis which, in accordance with its task, does not dare to approach the absolute as such, must at least do one thing: it must make sure that the relative remains relativized. For it is likely that a purely immanent perspective that is not even aware of its proximity to the transcendent—that every purely immanent perspective—will be, from the outset, a *distorting* perspective. And even if theology has been accused of anthropomorphism, we don't want to get to the point where anthropology can now be accused of theomorphism—in the sense that, in our theory of the essence of being human, once we have relativized the elements of fate in its biological, psychological and sociological aspects, we make that freedom absolute in itself! Thus, we see that even when the fear of biologism, psychologism and socialism has been exorcised, we are still threatened by one last danger: the danger of anthropologism.

Existential analysis, as such, was not able to answer the last question. The location to which it can bring a person is not a final stop, not the end of the line. But from this station, he will always be able to get a "direct connection" in the direction of the transcendent. Because this station is still located on the line towards the absolute, the absolute that can only be understood in terms of the religious experience.

What matters to us at this stage is to prove that there can be no contradiction between the experience of living responsibly for a non-religious person and for a religious person. In fact, the religious experience, the religious dimension, can only ever be a supplementary relationship.* We can see this precisely in how both the non-religious and the religious person experience their existence: the one as a straightforward task and therefore as an appeal to his responsibility, and the other—in a supplementary sense—also experiencing the entity that set the task, the task that is now experienced as a divine mission.

Even so, within the "space of immanence," which is the sole concern of existential analysis, there is still a kind of borderline case regarding our responsibility "before whom or what," i.e., the *conscience*. For the conscience is directed out from itself and *beyond* immanence; we see this clearly as soon as we understand conscience as a kind of moral instinct.

If I set myself the task of producing paper bags to package a product, then I will require a person with a level of intelligence, which is, after all, so low that I could entrust the task to one of the “idiots”* I am currently treating with occupational therapy in the psychiatric clinic. Conversely, if I set myself the task of constructing a machine that will manufacture these paper bags automatically, I will definitely need people with a higher level of intelligence to build this machine. It is similar with the so-called “wisdom of instincts.” As you may know, there is a species of beetle in which the females cut pieces out of leaves in a particular fashion (in accordance with an “irrational curve” that baffles even mathematicians) and then roll them up to make sacs into which they can safely lay their eggs. Should we not ask ourselves, “Isn’t it incredible what this ‘wise’ instinct can achieve?” This wisdom must be at an extremely high level to have produced such an instinct. Thus, we can see how instinct, even moral instinct—conscience—is pointing beyond itself and beyond immanence into transcendence.

Earlier, when we were speaking about a religious person as someone who, so to speak, experiences more and sees more because he additionally experiences the entity that sets the task, then certainly we must not infer any arrogance from the “superiority” of the religious experience vis-a-vis the non-religious experience. Rather, the only justifiable attitude of the religious person towards the non-religious person is tolerance. For, after all, the attitude of a sighted person towards a blind person is not disdain but compassion and a willingness to help.

But we’re talking about the religious person as if he were the sighted person in relation to the non-religious person. And that is wrong; how wrong is illustrated by the following allegory. If it is true that people in life are like actors on the stage, then let’s remember that the actor—blinded by the spotlight—does not see the audience or the auditorium, but a large black hole. He never sees “before whom” he is performing. And is it not the same for the average person? He too—blinded by the “light” of everyday life—does not see “before whom” he bears the responsibility for his existence (as an actor bears his role). He cannot see before whom he acts! And still there are always people who think that precisely in the spot where we see “nothing,” precisely there sits the Great Spectator who steadfastly watches us. These are the people who call out to us, “Watch out, you’re on stage and the curtain is up!”

*Dedicated to my friend, Hubert Gsur.**

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* We are by no means overlooking the social factor. Not even in relation to the development of neuroses. However, the psychotherapist cannot of himself bring about a revolution. What he can influence is only the attitude of the patient to his social fate. However, a change would certainly activate the patient, not only in his personal life, but also in his political attitude. [Note in Frankl's original published version of the text]

** Greek term for "political animal."

* [. . .] In many cases, Freud's findings are still valid. His dream theory, for example, will remain valid. However, it is not I who dream, it is the id that is dreaming me, and within the dynamic of the id, psychoanalytic theory still applies. In addition, please note that a therapeutic effect in psychotherapy, and indeed within psychiatry in general, does not prove that the theoretical assumptions are correct. Psychoanalysis is certainly effective, but probably because it ultimately contains an implicit appeal to the free and responsible ego that it likewise assumes to be present. Insulin shock treatment for schizophrenia is also based on untenable theoretical assumptions, yet has still proved to be effective. [Note in Frankl's original published version of the text]

* It would be important to make the relationship between the religious and the non-religious person easier by highlighting the supplementary (instead of opposing) nature of the relationship. In terms of the practical consequences, there must be a common denominator and a shared platform; in the space of immanence, religious and non-religious people can come together to find common ground for acting together. [Note in Frankl's original published version of the text]

* A medical term that was used at the time in Austria and Germany but is no longer in use. It denoted a person with severely reduced cognitive abilities.

* Hubert Gsur was an Austrian poet and a member of the resistance in Vienna. He was executed by the Nazi regime in 1944. A street in Vienna is named after him.

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ABOUT VIKTOR E. FRANKL

Viktor E. Frankl was professor of neurology and psychiatry at the University of Vienna and, for twenty-five years, head of the Vienna Neurological Policlinic. The logotherapy/existential analysis founded by him is also known as the Third Viennese Direction of Psychotherapy. He held visiting professorships at Harvard University, Stanford University, the University of Texas at Dallas, and the University of Pittsburgh, and was a Distinguished Professor of Logotherapy at the US International University, San Diego, California.

Frankl was born in Vienna in 1905. At the University of Vienna, he earned a doctorate in medicine and later also a doctorate in philosophy. During the Second World War, he spent three years in Auschwitz, Dachau, and other concentration camps. For four decades, he made countless lecture tours all over the world and was awarded twenty-nine honorary doctorates from universities in Europe, North and South America, Asia, and Africa. He received numerous awards, including the Oskar Pfister Award from the American Psychiatric Association and Honorary Membership in the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

Frankl's thirty-nine books have been published in fifty languages so far. The English version of . . . *trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen* (*Man's Search for Meaning*) achieved sales in the millions and was included in a list of the "Ten Most Influential Books in America." Viktor E. Frankl died in 1997 in Vienna.

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FURTHER WORKS BY VIKTOR E. FRANKL

A complete list of all books by Viktor E. Frankl and a comprehensive bibliography on logotherapy/existential analysis can be found on the website of the Viktor Frankl Institute: www.viktorfrankl.org.

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ABOUT THE VIKTOR FRANKL INSTITUTE

The Viktor Frankl Institute (VFI) was founded in Vienna in 1992 by an international circle of colleagues and friends under the aegis of Viktor Frankl. It is a scientific society with the goal of maintaining Viktor Frankl's work and promoting logotherapy and existential analysis as a psychiatric, psychological and philosophical field of research and as applied psychotherapy. It is also responsible for quality assurance for psychotherapy and counselling training in logotherapy and existential analysis. The Viktor Frankl Institute in Vienna is also the accreditation institution for training in classical logotherapy and existential analysis (following Frankl).

A list of over 150 accredited international institutions and national associations that provide training in logotherapy and existential analysis can be found on the VFI website.

The institute has exclusive access to the Viktor Frankl private archive and houses the world's largest collection of texts and research on logotherapy and existential analysis.

In 1999, in cooperation with the City of Vienna, the Viktor Frankl Fund of the City of Vienna was founded. In line with its objectives, from 2000 to 2018, the fund awarded annual prizes and scholarships to reward excellence and to promote research projects in the field of meaning-oriented humanistic psychotherapy. In addition, the fund awarded an annual honorary prize in recognition and appreciation of the life's work of outstanding persons. Previous award winners include Heinz von Foerster, Paul Watzlawick, Cardinal Franz König, Dame Cicely Saunders, Cardinal Óscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga and Eric Richard Kandel.

The institute offers the world's first state-accredited doctoral degree in logotherapy within the framework of the Viktor Frankl Chair of Philosophy and Psychology at the International Academy of Philosophy (university in the Principality of Liechtenstein). In collaboration with the Department for Logotherapy and Existential Analysis, founded in 2012 at the Moscow

Institute of Psychoanalysis in Russia, it also offers a master's program and psychotherapy training in logotherapy.

Information about the activities of logotherapy institutes around the world can be found on the VFI homepage. In addition to news on logotherapeutic research and practice, it includes a comprehensive bibliography of primary and secondary literature on logotherapy.

Further information can be found at www.viktorfrankl.org.

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